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Stewart Copeland

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Start with a bang

What are the most iconic openings in classical music?

Death at the keyboard

The tragic tale of Simon Barere

Cherubini's Médée

Opera's most shocking bloodbath

Violinist James Ehnes

How to convert classical naysayers

Also in this issue…

Jeff Goldblum on the music that has shaped his life

Soprano Masabane Cecilia Rangwanasha's concert hell

Yaaaawn… why it's OK to be bored during a concert

100 reviews by the world's finest critics
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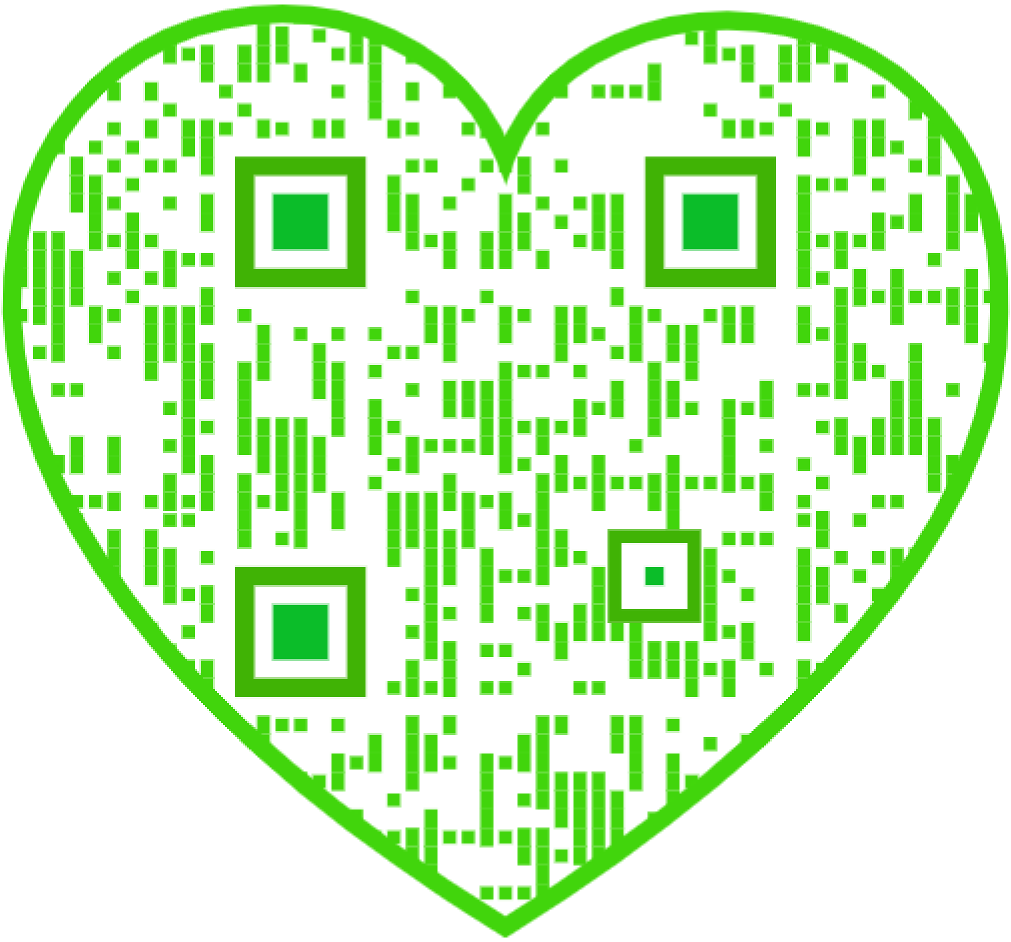

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Welcome

'Being a pianist is a very solitary job,' says this month's cover star Yuja Wang. Indeed, she admits, if she had her time again, she might have chosen another career path. Not that Wang isn't grateful for all that she has achieved, as she tells Clive Paget on page 24. But being a top musician – even of the collaborative type – involves a great deal of independent thought, and the capacity to delve deeply into the score.

Such solitary study is crucial when memorising music, as five great soloists explain on page 46. Practising a piece repeatedly may train the hands to perform those tricky passages – but in moments of stress, when standing in the spotlight on a darkened stage, muscle memory alone can fail. On page 42, Nicholas Collon, director of Aurora Orchestra, speaks to Rebecca Franks about the difficulty of memorising complex orchestral works for the group's celebrated BBC Proms performances – collective feats of recollection that have earned them plaudits aplenty over the past 20 years.

And it turns out that a deeper understanding of the score can help us to be more engaged as listeners, too. On page 58, Ariane Todes investigates the highly taboo topic of the mind wandering – dare we call it 'boredom' – in concerts, and gives advice on how we can all focus more effectively and enjoyably. Happy listening!

Charlotte

Charlotte Smith *Editor*

THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS

Anthony Cheng

Writer, producer & filmmaker

'When in conversations with Andrew Keener he enraptures you with his passion for record producing. His craft is not only his job but his whole sense of being. His erudition of classical music record history is truly second to none.' ***Page 34***

Ariane Todes

Writer and editor

'How many people are put off classical music by the feeling that they have to pay constant attention in concerts? I often think about this as my mind wanders during a performance, so I wanted to shed light on a taboo subject.' ***Page 58***

Mervyn Cooke

Professor of music

'Whether accompanying an exotic dance routine at Harlem's Cotton Club or impressing at a Carnegie Hall concert, Duke Ellington's music was among the most original and sophisticated ever written for jazz musicians.' ***Page 64***

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Plus our favourite opening bars in classical music (see p38)

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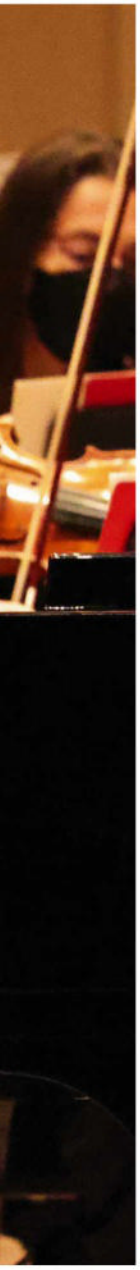

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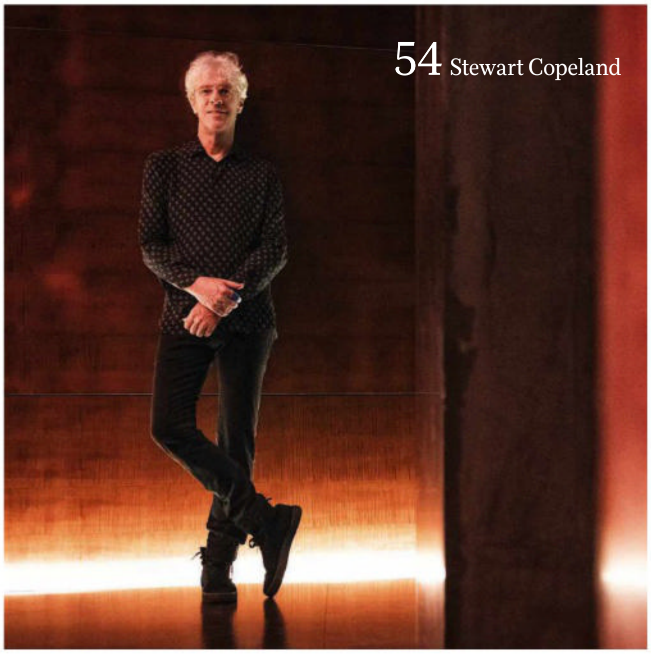

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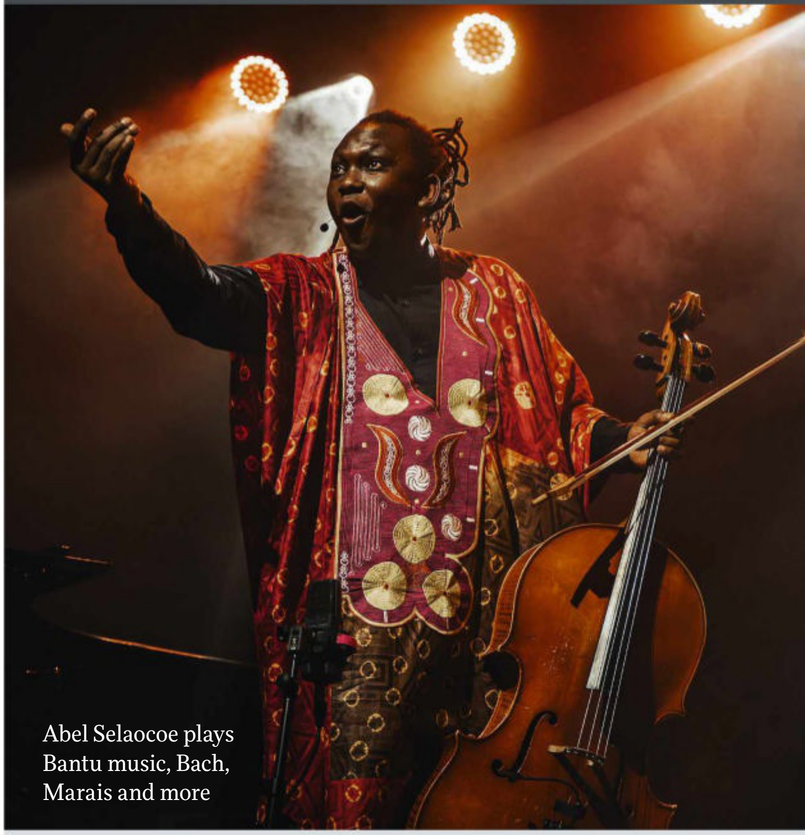
April reviews

Your guide to the best new recordings and books



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Abel Selaocoe
Hymns of Bantu

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'This is an utter delight of an album, offering a potent reminder of the life-affirming power of music to bring joy'

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LETTER *of the* MONTH

Making a point: Rimsky-Korsakov's *The Golden Cockerel*, London Coliseum, 2014

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Cocking a snook

Stephen Johnson's article on political satire in music (*When music bites*; January) was most enjoyable and I would like to mention another work that fits: Rimsky-Korsakov's last opera, *The Golden Cockerel*. The composer, who had served for many years in the Russian Navy, was bitter after the Tsar sent it to its annihilation in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5. His disenchantment with the government increased when it put down protests by brutal force in 1905. In 1906, he began writing *The Golden Cockerel*, based on a story about the foolish Tsar Dodon. When Rimsky-Korsakov submitted the opera to the Tsar's censors in 1907, they rejected it – the anti-Romanov satire was not going to be tolerated and the composer was told that he would have to make significant changes. He declined and was seeing about getting the opera performed in Paris when he died in 1908.
George Leef, *Raleigh, NC, US*

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Master of the harp

I was delighted to see a reference to the great harpist John Thomas in your March issue (*Timepiece*) – his death in March 1913 was certainly noted in the major journals of the day. As you say, Thomas was indeed a teacher at the Royal College of Music (and the Guildhall School of Music) but his main affiliation was with the Royal Academy of Music. This is where he studied under JB Chatterton and Cipriani Potter from the age of 14; later, he taught at the Academy, and had a lifelong association with that institution. There is still a prize under his name at the Academy, and I'm proud to be the first ever harpist to be an Honorary Research Fellow at the RAM, working mainly on John Thomas.
Sioned Williams, *via email*

Great Scott

'Best of' lists almost inevitably turn into 'what I like most' lists and your feature on film scores (March) was no exception. One can argue about whether *ET* really is better than *Star Wars*, or *Blade Runner* a better score than *Chariots of Fire*, but, drawn almost exclusively from the 1960s to the '90s (i.e. a period when the voters were growing up and exploring music), a 'best' list which ignores Korngold's *Adventures of Robin Hood* struggles to be taken seriously – ironic, since a whole article on the composer occupied a few later pages. No Max Steiner, no Miklós Rózsa, not to mention that early champion of film music, Vaughan Williams? The situation is slightly better when the longer online list is considered and I suppose one should be grateful that the scores did not all come from the last ten years (being at the forefront of people's minds), but VW's *Scott of the Antarctic* does not appear at all, which is unbelievable.
Geoffrey Cotterill, *Oxfordshire*

It's not true, man…

Erm, sorry to be a smart Alec, but when the remarkable Ray Eveleigh passed his Grade 7 piano exam in 1957 (*The Full Score*, March), Dwight D Eisenhower was US president, not Harry S Truman.
Christopher Morley,
Halesowen

The editor replies:
A fair comment. We have given the deputy editor a list of the complete US presidents and their dates to learn for his homework…

Talented dad

Further to 'Family frolics' (Letters, March) but in reverse, the father of actor David McCallum (*UNCLE, Colditz* etc) was the famous Scottish violinist, also David, one time leader of the Scottish Orchestra (later the RSNO) and also of the RPO and the LPO.
Graeme Wilson, *Kirkcaldy*

Sizzle-free Gluck

An article on Gluck is welcome, of course, and Paul Riley draws an effective picture of his development (*Composer of the Month*, February), so I hope it isn't churlish to mention a couple of things. The third opera of the Gluck-Calzabigi collaboration, *Paride ed Elena*, surely rates a mention. It possesses beauties that are entirely its own, as does *Armide*; both these operas have recently been revived in Britain. And may I mention a comment on *Iphigénie en Tauride* that is certainly mistaken: Act I does not end with 'a sizzling fusillade of vocal pyrotechnics'. It ends with a chorus. There are no such pyrotechnics in Gluck's works for the Paris Opéra, with the qualified exception of the aria that ends Act I of *Orphée* – an addition to the Italian original of 1762.

Julian Rushton,
Emeritus Professor of Music, University of Leeds

The royal wolf

It would be nice if we could persuade The Princess of Wales into the recording studio (not withstanding her health) for the narration part of Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*. We've had actors, singers, presenters etc, so why not a Royal? An ideal coupling would be Prokofiev's genial Seventh Symphony; the orchestra: the National Youth Orchestra; and the conductor: Sir Simon Rattle.

Crichton Thomas,
Bristol

Orchestral boffins

I read *Musical Formula*, your January feature about musical scientists, with interest. You might be interested to know about two 'amateur' orchestras in Boston, Massachusetts, US, comprised almost exclusively of full-time scientists of various disciplines, who perform music as an avocation. One is the Longwood Symphony Orchestra, made up of physicians, nurses and other clinicians and persons involved in the medical sciences. The orchestra takes its name from the Longwood Medical Area in Boston, wherein are numerous world-renowned medical institutions. The second is the Kendall Square Symphony Orchestra, which takes its name from an area of Cambridge, Massachusetts that features numerous high-tech companies, including software firms, robotics companies, biomedical research and engineering companies, plus assorted consulting firms and start-ups in virtually all of these areas. These orchestras hold a number of concerts a year and display a high level of musical professionalism and musicality, and at a bargain price too.

Michael Costello,
Jamaica Plain, MA, US

'S Wonderful duo: George and Ira Gershwin in New Jersey, 1936

Don't go changing

Regarding the observations of Richard Morrison (December) and Rod Chisholm (Letters, January) on listening to Handel's *Messiah* on 78rpm discs, my parents started me listening to theirs when I was three years old, in 1948. By that time, audio technology had advanced to the point where the albums were manufactured in 'automatic sequence', so that successive sides could be dropped on the platter by a record changer in the correct order. I doubt that any record changer could cope with the 19 discs of *Messiah* at once, but if the full complement were divided into four stacks, then the listener would need to get up only eight times, not 37 or 38, to switch the stacks and then turn them over to play the remaining sides. As for standing up for the 'Hallelujah Chorus', we don't do that here in the colonies.

Daniel Morrison,
Congers, NY, US

If I had words

George Hall's review of Michael Owen's *Ira Gershwin – A Life in Words* (Book Reviews; January) quotes the lyricist's dictum that his profession required not only 'a certain dexterity with words' but also 'a feeling for music'. The truth of this was demonstrated in a story which doesn't appear in Owen's fine book. When the Gershwins were working on the songs for Astaire and Rogers' *Shall We Dance*, George played a fragment on the piano, and Ira told him, 'If you can repeat that first note four more times, I can write, "The way you wear your hat"...' The rest is history – and 'They Can't Take That Away From Me'.

Preston Neal Jones,
Hollywood, CA, US

Different beats

Jeremy Pound's fascinating *The Conductors' Orchestra* (December) hit a deep nerve. I've seen a good number of the conductors mentioned in action, and having myself been immersed as an amateur musician in piano, violin, viola, flute, Irish flute, piccolo and fife, I speak from experience as to how each instrument carries its own aura of creativity, difficulty and intellectual challenge – not to mention all the different ways each in its own way brings music to life. I have often thought how different a conductor who has, say, mastered the piano might approach a great violin concerto by Brahms or Walton. Or how one proficient in the viola might take one of Mozart's flute concertos. The cross-over would be a fascinating study. I have another challenge, though, that the article teases out: what about really creating an orchestra whose members are all conductors?

Dennis Terez,
University Heights, OH, US

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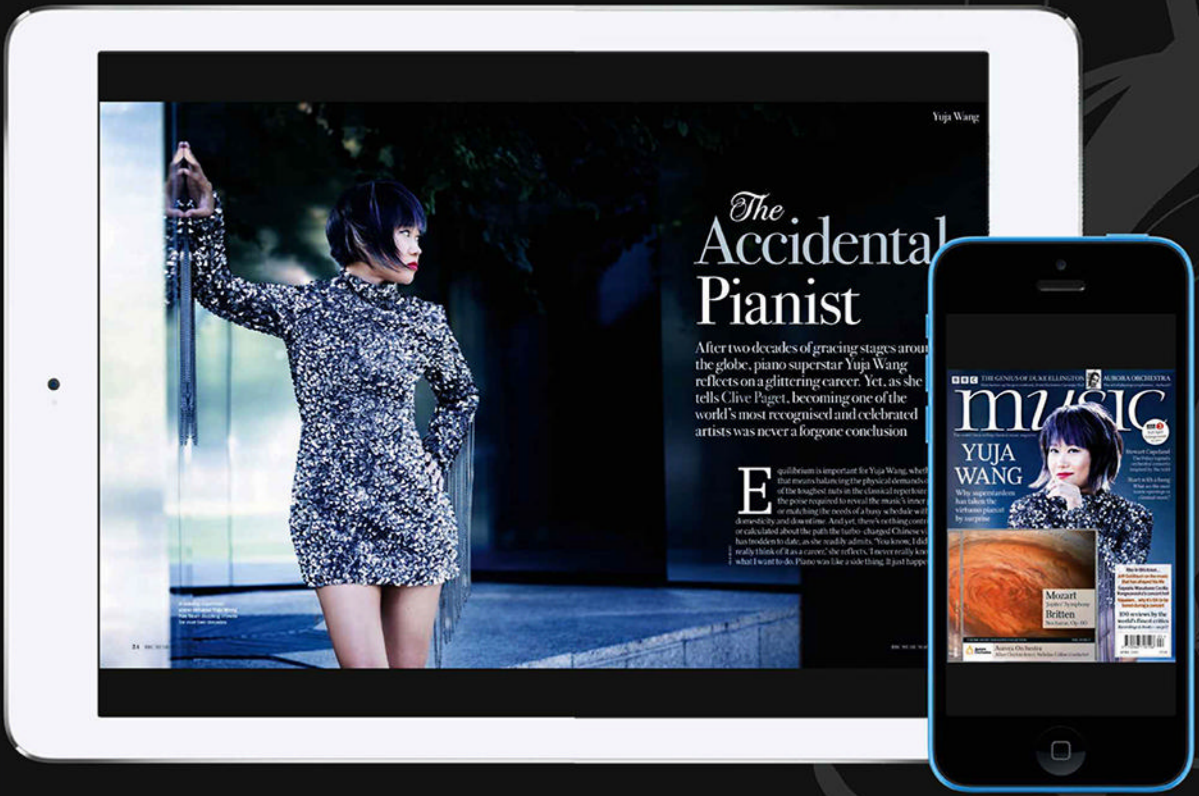

Yuja Wang

The Accidental Pianist

After two decades of gracing stages arou the globe, piano superstar Yuja Wang reflects on a glittering career. Yet, as she tells Clive Paget, becoming one of the world's most recognised and celebrated artists was never a forgone conclusion

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BBC music MAGAZINE

The *full* score

Our pick of the month's news, views and interviews

Trump takes over at Washington's Kennedy Center

President's appointment as chairman creates waves at principal US arts complex

Comings and goings: Donald Trump takes to the stage at the Kennedy Center, 2017; (above) Renée Fleming has quit her post at the Center

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Renée Fleming is one of a number of leading performers to have distanced themselves from Washington's John F Kennedy Memorial Center for the Performing Arts following Donald Trump's appointment of himself as chairman and the replacement of many board members. Announcing her resignation as artistic advisor at large on social media, the US soprano also praised the work of former chairman David M Rubenstein and outgoing president Deborah F Rutter, whose contract has been terminated. Singer-songwriter Ben Folds and producer and screenwriter Shonda Rhimes have similarly resigned their Kennedy Center posts, while other artists have cancelled performances.

The US president first announced his plans to take over the reins of the Kennedy Center in early February, revealing his intentions on the social media platform Truth Social. 'At my direction, we are going to make the Kennedy Center in Washington D.C., GREAT AGAIN,' he wrote, adding that 'I have decided to immediately terminate multiple individuals from the Board of Trustees, including the Chairman, who do not share our Vision for a Golden Age in Arts and Culture. We will soon announce a new Board, with an amazing Chairman, DONALD J. TRUMP!'. The Center's management responded by explaining that as an organisation it has always enjoyed support from all political parties and has had a bi-partisan board of trustees, and that while there was nothing in its statute that would prevent a new administration from replacing board members, such a move had never happened before in its history.

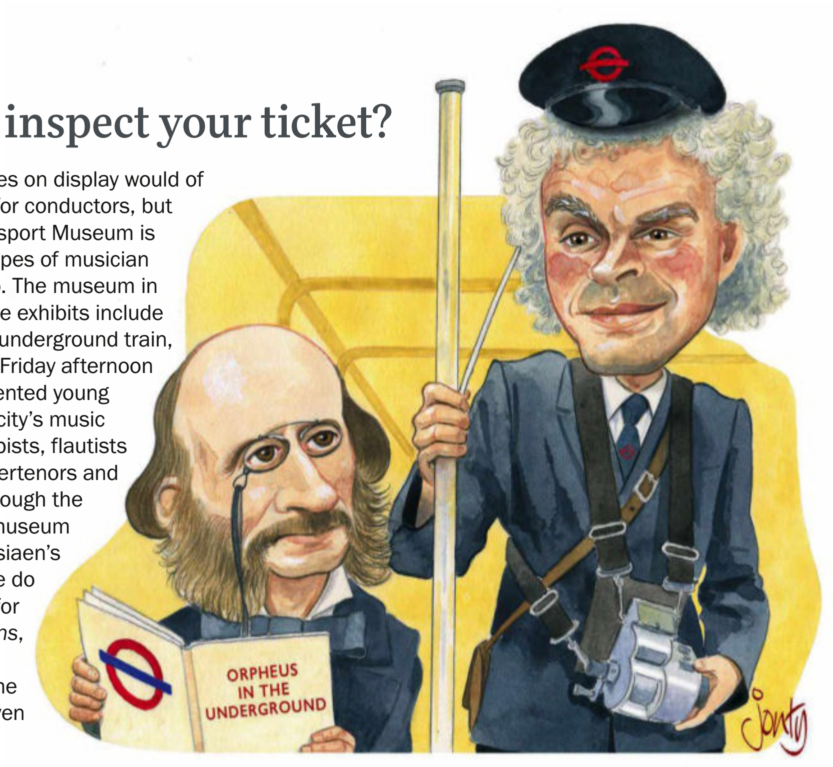
The president announced his plans to take over the reins in early February

That history stretches back to when, in 1958, president Eisenhower signed into law the foundation of a new cultural centre in the capital, an idea initially mooted by first lady Eleanor Roosevelt in the 1930s. Following the assassination of president Kennedy during the funding and construction stage, it was announced that the centre would be named in his honour, and it finally opened with a performance of Bernstein's Mass in September 1971. Housing both an opera house and a concert hall, the Center is home to Washington National Opera and the National Symphony Orchestra.

With Trump appearing to take particular aim at shows featuring LGBTQ+ performers – his Truth Social post specifically said that drag shows 'WILL STOP' – the International Pride Orchestra has since revealed that it has been disinvited from playing at the Center. *The Washington Post*, meanwhile, has also reported that since the instalment of the new chairman and new board members, a drop in ticket sales has been noted.

Can-can I inspect your ticket?

Somewhere with buses on display would of course be a magnet for conductors, but now the London Transport Museum is inviting many other types of musician to come on board too. The museum in Covent Garden, whose exhibits include the first ever electric underground train, is hosting a series of Friday afternoon concerts given by talented young performers from the city's music academies, from harpists, flautists and pianists to countertenors and jazz saxophonists. Though the lack of organ at the museum will rule rule out Messiaen's *Transports de joie*, we do hope they find room for Reich's *Different Trains*, Vaughan Williams's Tube-a Concerto, some Busoni and maybe even a bit of *Carmen*…



Holst house gets Grade II uplift

A house doesn't have to be grand to be deemed important. As is the case of 9 Church Walk, Aldeburgh, the former home of composer Imogen Holst (above), which has been awarded Grade II listing by Historic England. Though fairly unremarkable from the outside, the 1964 bungalow, which was designed by HT and Elizabeth Cadbury-Brown, is fitted with features such as a soundproof music room and still holds many of Holst's possessions plus an oak music cupboard once belonging to her father, Gustav.

Musicians in AI stand

Alongside pop stars Ed Sheeran, Kate Bush and Damon Albarn, composers Hans Zimmer, Max Richter and Stephen Hough are among more than 1,000 musicians who have released an entirely silent album to protest against planned changes in copyright laws that would allow their work to be freely accessed by AI. Called *Is This What We Want?*, the album consists of 12 tracks whose titles spell out the message 'The British Government Must Not Legalise Music Theft To Benefit AI Companies' and is the brainchild of composer Ed Newton-Rex, founder of Fairly Trained, a non-profit organisation that certifies fair data training use in AI.

What has sparked the musicians' protest is the British government's proposal that tech firms should be free to use creators' content on the internet to develop their AI models unless the copyright holders specifically choose to opt out. This, says composer Thomas Hewitt-Jones, could prove hugely damaging to the music sector. 'Generative AI competes with the work that it is trained on and the people behind that work,' he tells the Reuters news service. 'If I were to copy a piece of music by a living composer without asking, it would be a copyright infringement. Why are tech companies any different? Large-scale systematic data mining of entire catalogues with no form of recompense cannot be justified.'

Composers John Rutter, James MacMillan, The King's Singers and The Sixteen are among the classical musicians participating in *Is This What We Want?*, profits from the sales of which will go to the Help Musicians charity.

Silent protestors: (clockwise from left) Stephen Hough, Kate Bush, Hans Zimmer and Max Richter

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APRIL 1951

Carnegie Hall witnesses a top pianist's fatal final concerto

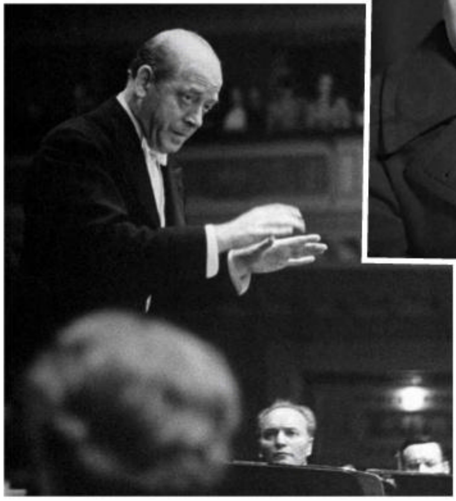
On the evening of 2 April 1951, the 54-year-old Simon Barere stepped on stage at Carnegie Hall, New York, to play Grieg's perennially popular Piano Concerto. It was, remarkably, the first time Barere had ever performed the piece in public, despite his reputation as a scintillating virtuoso of strong poetic instincts.

At first all seemed well, as conductor Eugene Ormandy cued the Philadelphia Orchestra for the timpani roll and crashing chord which open the Grieg concerto. 'Mr Barere appeared to be in top form,' the *New York Times* reviewer Olin Downes wrote. 'His entrance solo was brilliantly delivered.' Soon, though, Downes became 'puzzled' by irregularities in Barere's performance, whose pace seemed 'excessively fast'. Then, just after the cellos had announced the movement's second theme, came disaster. Downes initially thought Barere had bent sideways to listen 'with especial attention to the instruments as he matched his tone with theirs'. But then the pianist's left hand slipped from the keyboard, and he instantly 'fell senseless from the stool to the floor'.

The orchestra stopped playing 'in consternation', and shouts went up for a doctor. Barere was carried from the stage 'with some difficulty' and taken to a dressing room. Police and an ambulance were summoned, and for half an hour attempts were made to revive the stricken pianist. They were in vain: Barere never regained consciousness and was subsequently pronounced by the medical examiner to have died of a 'spontaneous cerebral haemorrhage'.

The concert in the hall had meanwhile continued, on the assumption that Barere had suffered a fainting fit or some other non-life-threatening incident. The Swedish tenor Set Svanholm performed a song cycle by Ture Rangström – 'with the most admirable expressiveness and control', wrote Downes – and a planned interval followed, but the rest of the programme was never completed.

Horrifying moment: (left) the Carnegie Hall audience was told mid-concert that Simon Barere (right) had died; (below) conductor Eugene Ormandy; (bottom) discs of Barere's previous concerts



When the orchestra reassembled to play Nielsen's Fifth Symphony, a shocked audience was told Barere had died, 'and it was the feeling of all the musicians taking part in the concert that it should be abandoned'. Barere's wife Helen and son Boris were in Carnegie Hall that evening: the sheer awfulness of what they saw and experienced can only be imagined.

In such a horrifying way was Barere's life cut short – the end of a career path that itself had been anything but smooth. Born in Odessa in 1896, Barere was the eleventh of 13 children in an impoverished Jewish family. When his father died unexpectedly, the youthful Barere earned money for the family by playing in silent movie cinemas and restaurants. The death of his mother when he was 16 was another serious setback. But Barere ploughed on.

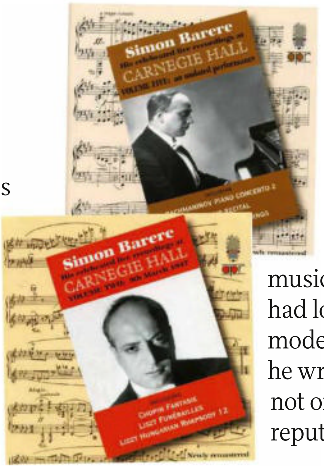
A scintillating audition gained him admission to the St Petersburg Imperial Conservatory, and he spent seven years there honing his brilliant natural talent. The composer Glazunov, the conservatory's director, bent the usual rules designed to keep Jews from attending and ensured Barere stayed long enough to avoid conscription for World War I military service. Barere finally graduated in 1919 with the Rubinstein Prize, the conservatory's top award for pianists. A glittering future beckoned.

But instead, he had to battle constantly with adversity. At first confined to Russia, he eventually left for Latvia, where his wife and son joined him. In 1932, the family decamped to Berlin, just as National Socialism and anti-semitism were on the rise. For a period, Barere was reduced to playing in vaudeville shows anonymously for money. A shift to London followed, and the attention that his performances gleaned there brought an invitation first to the US, and then his Carnegie Hall debut in November 1936.

Barere's left hand slipped, and he 'fell senseless from the stool to the floor'

New York loved Barere, and what one critic called 'his superb technique and his command of sensitively managed singing tone'. The years of wandering in Europe, with their stop-start impact on his career development, seemed finally to be over. The 1940s were good to Barere, and by the time he walked 'briskly' on to the Carnegie Hall platform on that fateful day in 1951, he had a global reputation as a viscerally exciting performer.

The following day, the pianist's body was taken to lie in state at Riverside Memorial Chapel, a Jewish funeral home in Manhattan. 'From 1pm to 10pm at least 500 persons had viewed Mr Barere's body,' the *New York Times* reported. Olin Downes had no doubt about the stature of the musician the classical community had lost. 'There was no more modest, studious and sincere artist,' he wrote admiringly. 'He leaves not only a great but an enviable reputation behind him.' ***Terry Blain***



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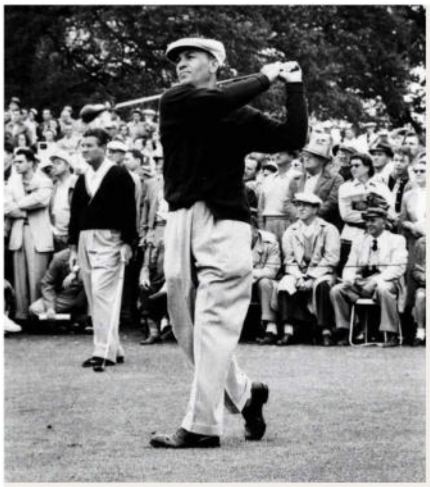


Major success: Ben Hogan wins The Masters

Also in April 1951...

7th: US Golfer **Ben Hogan** wins the Masters Tournament at Augusta National Golf Club, hitting a final round of 68 to triumph by two shots. The win is Hogan's fifth in golf's four major annual championships, and will be followed by another two months later when he successfully defends the US Open.

11th: As the Korean War heads towards stalemate, US President Harry S Truman relieves **Douglas MacArthur** of his position as Commander of the Far East. The increasingly insubordinate MacArthur has recently been critical of Truman's strategy in a letter sent to Joseph W Martin Jnr, the Republican leader in the House of Representatives.

18th: At the Treaty of Paris, France, Italy, West Germany, Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands sign the **Europe Declaration**, establishing the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). Intended to bring economic and political stability after World War II, the declaration states that its participants are 'laying the true foundation of an organised Europe'.

26th: Vaughan Williams's **The Pilgrim's Progress**, based on the 17th-century allegory by John Bunyan, is performed for the first time at the Royal Opera House. Conducted, at the composer's request, by Leon Hancock and featuring baritone Arnold Matters as the Pilgrim, the opera does not prove an immediate success, but will go on to fare better in later productions.

29th: Ludwig Wittgenstein dies in Cambridge, UK, aged 62. As well as authoring influential works including 1922's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, the eminent Austrian philosopher led an eventful life that included winning awards for outstanding bravery in World War I and being interned for nine months in an Italian prisoner-of-war camp.

Music to my ears

Goin' to the chapel: Ben Goldscheider performed in London

The *BBC Music Magazine* team's current favourites...

Charlotte Smith *Editor*
A trip to the cinema to see *A Real Pain* was anything but. A buddy comedy with a sharp twist, this low-key drama features fabulous performances from its stars Jesse Eisenberg (who also wrote and directed) and Kieran Culkin (by turns charming and cruel) as Jewish cousins on a heritage tour through Poland. A soundtrack comprised entirely of keyboard works by **Chopin** was particularly effective – performed with cool elegance by Tzvi Erez.

Jeremy Pound *Deputy editor*
Having recently enjoyed its third instalment, tenor James Gilchrist's day-long gathering of Cheltenham's many choirs – from children's choruses to those of us of a more senior disposition – seems set to become an annual event. Before we all unleashed our vocal cords in the glorious space of 'Pip and Jim's' church, Gilchrist himself showed how it should be done with a gorgeous rendition of **Mendelssohn**'s quirky but delightful 'Auf Flügeln des Gesanges'.

Michael Beek *Reviews editor*
Who knew there was a little old chapel-cum-music venue hidden off London's Shaftesbury Avenue? I found myself at 'Stone Nest' for the release of **Gavin Higgins**'s *The Faerie Bride* on Nimbus Records. The domed chapel supplied a great acoustic for a performance by Ben Goldscheider of Higgins's sprightly horn *Fanfare*, and mezzo Marta Fontanals-Simmons in the composer's arrangement of 'Suo Gân' accompanied by Lana Bode.

Steve Wright *Content producer*
My obsession with the Brahms symphonies has led me to several other late-19th century German symphonies, in search of similar rewards. Generally, they haven't measured up, but **Friedrich Gernsheim**'s four efforts come close. The odd-numbered symphonies are in a minor key, the evens major; No. 2 has a *Tarantella*, while No. 3 makes atmospheric use of the harp. All four, in their recordings on the CPO label, are fresh and absorbing.

Valuable lessons: Rangwanasha uses every concert as a learning opportunity; (opposite) performing *Elijah* with Antonio Pappano and Sarah Connolly

Concert Heaven
Concert Hell

Top artists recall their best and worst performances

THIS MONTH
Masabane Cecilia Rangwanasha
soprano

CONCERT HEAVEN

Mendelssohn Elijah
Masabane Cecilia Rangwanasha (soprano), Sarah Connolly (mezzo-soprano), Gerald Finley (baritone), Allan Clayton (tenor); London Symphony Orchestra/Antonio Pappano
Barbican, London (January 2024)

There are many wonderful concerts and it's so difficult to choose my highlight! But perhaps I would select a concert at the Barbican last year with the London Symphony Orchestra, when we recorded Mendelssohn's *Elijah*. I love the music, and it felt like a spiritual experience. I just enjoyed it so much.

That was my debut appearance with the LSO (they are a wonderful orchestra) and also my first time singing the Mendelssohn, so it was all very exciting. I worked on my part at the Royal Opera House, because I was a Young Artist there, and I got to see my coaches and vocal teachers. We worked on the piece, finding different dynamics and meaning; even though it's in English, there's a lot of work that needs to be done. We also had normal rehearsal times – two rehearsals with the orchestra and a dress rehearsal –and then the performance. And it was a recording, not just a performance!

My colleagues were Dame Sarah Connolly, Gerald Finley and Allan Clayton – such a 'wow' cast – so I enjoyed the rehearsals. The conductor

was Antonio Pappano, and his suggestions were very interesting and a good learning opportunity for me; it was interesting to see him working with other people, for example Gerald Finley who had a much bigger part as Elijah.

All the other singers were much more experienced than me, but when you get to the rehearsal, everyone knows their parts, and no matter how much you have performed the piece, when you perform it with different people – a new orchestra, new conductor, new soloists – it becomes new for everyone.

CONCERT HELL

Poulenc Stabat Mater

Masabane Cecilia Rangwanasha (soprano); Orchestra and Chorus Teatro Regio Torino/James Conlon

Teatro Regio, Torino (January 2025)

This wasn't actually about the concert itself; I enjoyed my time there and love the maestro. Usually when I learn my music I listen to recordings, try to connect with the music and go to a deeper level, to understand what the piece means and how to get into the character. I had done Rossini's Stabat Mater, which I loved very much, and this was another Stabat Mater – about the mother of Jesus and how she felt when she saw her son on the cross. I am Christian, so these are stories I like and I try to understand the works first as a text.

So I thought this would all be good, and then I looked at the music. The notes were nice and floaty – high notes, just what I like – but as I started to learn my part, I realised, 'I'm not falling in love with this music.' This was the first time, after having learned so much music, that I felt this way. I am supposed to love it, because the text is beautiful, and I see what it means. But there was something in the music that I didn't get. I did the concert, and there were things I learned in this music, vocal things, so it wasn't a waste, because I still learned something.

For the first time, though, I had to try really hard to be inspired. James Conlon is a fantastic maestro, though, and I enjoy working with him so much. The Teatro Regio is a fantastic house and Turin has become one of my favourite places to visit, because it is so beautiful. The problem was the music! There are other beautiful songs by Poulenc that I enjoy singing, just not this particular piece. Maybe if I perform it many more times, I will really start to enjoy it.

Masabane Cecilia Rangwanasha's debut solo album 'Masabane Cecilia' is out now on Rubicon.

MARK ALLAN, VERA ELMA VACEK, HELGE NORBAKKEN, KAUPO KIKKAS

Mother and son: then (above) and (below) now

MyHero

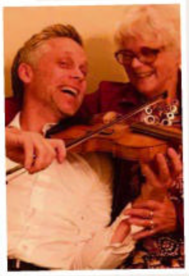
Violinist ***Bjarte Eike*** salutes the profound impact his mother ***Dr Christine Eike*** has had on his worldview

My mother was born in Vienna in 1941. Her father, a music professor, was captured in Normandy on D-Day. She didn't meet him until the age of six. Instead, she was a 'Red Cross child' – malnourished, homeless, and put on a train to neutral Switzerland.

Some time later, my mother went to university back in Vienna and then took a PhD, which included a year in Oslo studying Nordic myths and traditions. She met a Norwegian man and moved to Norway, where she has been ever since. She learned Norwegian in a couple of months. A teacher for many years, she later became a researcher in Nordic traditions and has published several works on the subject.

My mother has two sides that I recognise in myself. First is her stubbornness, her moral and ethical strength. Second is her insatiable curiosity and thirst for knowledge. She has practised tai chi every day for 40 years, and she's a prominent Rosicrucian – she has translated many of the mystical movement's key texts from 17th-century German into Norwegian.

My own fascination with early music comes from my mother's interest in broader historical contexts. It's a desire to understand not just the music, but the whole world around it. She is always trying to find new angles. That resonates with how I approach music and programming.



The tai chi has rubbed off on me as well – I am also a qualified yoga instructor!

Bjarte Eike performs at the London Handel Festival on 5 April. Full info: london-handel-festival.com/show/2025-handel-knights

THE LISTENING SERVICE

Lights, camera... composers!

Hollywood has taken an unexpected interest in classical music of late, says **Tom Service** – so here are some suggestions for their next blockbusting successes

ILLUSTRATION: MARIA CORTE MAIDAGAN

More than the usual number of classical music stories have made it onto our screens recently, from Cate Blanchett's conductor-skewering *Tár* to Bradley Cooper's *Maestro*, his love-letter to Leonard Bernstein; from Stephen Williams's *Chevalier*, on the astounding life of Joseph Bologne, to Angelina Jolie's vividly stylish turn as Maria Callas. Too much of a good thing? Impossible – Hollywood's just getting started! Expect all of these soon...

Dmitri Shostakovich: the real *Die Another Day*. Denounced by Stalin. Interrogated by the secret police. What happened when Shostakovich was questioned by Stalin's henchmen? What battles of the soul played out in that bunker in 1937, as Shostakovich fought for his life, answering accusations that he was involved in a plot to overthrow Stalin? And what was the miracle that meant he survived when he was asked to return a few days later – usually a sign of a long stay in the gulag, or worse. Was it administrative coincidence that his case was dropped, or the intervention of some higher power – Soviet, Stalin, or supernatural?

Ethel Smyth: Rebel With a Cause. Composer. Suffragette. Free-thinker. Ethel Smyth's life across the 20th century makes her a front-running candidate for Cate Blanchett's next Oscar-winning role. 'The March of the Women' is just the most famous piece of a life in which boundaries were broken. Smyth refused to be pigeon-holed, fighting for her own voice in her compositions, just as much as she did for the Suffragettes – and as she did in her affairs of the heart, from Henry Bennet Brewster to Virginia Woolf. Smyth is a rebel for her time, and ours.

William Byrd and the Gunpowder Plot: thought *Wolf Hall* was full of intrigue and skullduggery? That's nothing compared to the way William Byrd negotiated life as England's most famous composer, and one of its most celebrated Catholics in the 16th and 17th centuries. How did he appeal to Anglican and Protestant royalty while never giving up his faith? His late masses, written for secret performance in priest-holes and Catholic houses, are musical jewels for all time. But might they also be coded collections, whose secrets of rebellion and insurrection haven't yet been uncovered? Mark Rylance stars as Byrd: recusant, musical radical and man of mystery.

> Smyth's rebellious life makes her a front runner for Cate Blanchett's next role

And those are just the ones that Hollywood ought to have greenlit: look out in the future for a *Name of the Rose*-style mystery on how two composers, Léonin and Pérotin, exploded medieval imaginations with the invention of polyphony around 1200 at Notre-Dame in Paris, and an arthouse treatment of the magic of Carlos Kleiber's conducting: the most dangerously intoxicating choreography there's ever been. Classical music's golden age on the silver screen has just begun!

BBC RADIO 3 **Tom Service plays the best music to start your weekend in *Saturday Morning* at 9am**

FAREWELL TO...

Supreme Mozartian: soprano Edith Mathis in Munich, 1981

Edith Mathis Born 1938 *Soprano*

Edith Mathis was one of the pre-eminent Mozart singers of the 20th century, as can be heard in roles such as Susanna in conductor Karl Böhm's 1968 recording of *The Marriage of Figaro* or as Pamina in the acclaimed 1981 recording of *The Magic Flute* under the baton of Herbert von Karajan. Born in Lucerne, Switzerland, Mathis forged her early career in Germany before widening her horizons with debuts at opera houses including Glyndebourne, Covent Garden and the New York Met in the 1960s and early '70s. In 1984, her sublime 'Sull'aria' duet with Gundula Janowitz enjoyed worldwide fame when it was played to prison inmates in the film *The Shawshank Redemption*.

Olga James Born 1929 *Singer and actress*

Olga James will be best remembered for playing the role of Cindy Lou in the 1954 film *Carmen Jones* which, derived from Bizet's *Carmen*, featured an all-African American cast. Born in Washington DC, James studied as an opera singer at New York's Juilliard School, where she became friends with fellow singer Leontyne Price. After *Carmen Jones*, her career headed towards Broadway where, in 1956, she created the role of Ethel Pearson opposite Sammy Davis Jr. in the musical *Mr Wonderful*. From 1962 until his death in 1975, she was married to the jazz saxophonist Julian 'Cannonball' Adderley.

Henry Kelly Born 1946 *Radio presenter*

When Classic FM launched in September 1992, Henry Kelly was the first ever presenter of the radio station's popular weekday morning show before moving on to the Breakfast Show, building up a large following on both programmes. Having cut his teeth in journalism as a Belfast-based reporter for *The Irish Times* during the height of The Troubles in the 1970s, the Athlone-born Kelly then moved in a very different direction into light entertainment on TV, notably on ITV's *Game for a Laugh* and the BBC's quiz show *Going for Gold*. In 2008, he shared his love of Elgar's Cello Concerto in *BBC Music Magazine*.

Simon Lindley Born 1948 *Organist*

For more than four decades from the mid-1970s onwards, Simon Lindley enjoyed a distinguished reputation in the posts of organist and master of the music at Leeds Minster (Leeds Parish Church) and Leeds city organist. He was also the founding conductor of Saint Peter's Singers in Leeds, a 40-voice ensemble set up by Harry Fearnley in 1977. Outside his Yorkshire home patch, he was president of the Royal College of Organists from 2000-3, and his many recordings included several volumes of Handel's organ concertos for the Naxos label.

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MUSIC

THE MAGNIFICENT SEVEN

Pick a theme... and name your seven favourite examples

Violinist James Ehnes selects pieces to play for sceptics who don't believe they'll like classical music

Hailing from Canada, James Ehnes is one of the world's most renowned violinists, and has performed with orchestras all over the globe. A devoted chamber musician, he leads the Ehnes Quartet and is artistic director of the Seattle Chamber Music Society. He is also a visiting professor at the Royal Academy of Music in London and, since August 2024, a member of the faculty at the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music. His recording of Bach's Complete Violin Concertos with the National Arts Centre Orchestra is out on the Analekta label on 28 March.

Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto

I've had personal experiences of playing this piece a lot in big outdoor settings; I've played it in Central Park twice and I think it's a piece that shows everything classical music has to offer. It has lyricism, it has incredible excitement, it has this great sense of pageantry in the orchestration, it has melodies, it has virtuosity, it has great orchestral sections where everyone's blasting away, and it has the soloist as hero. Overall, I think it's the type of piece from which people walk away whistling the tunes and remembering them.

Sergei Rachmaninov Prelude Op. 32, No. 10

Despite there being a lot of classical hits by Rachmaninov, this is a piece that people outside the classical world might not know. And if they listen and still think, 'Well I just don't like classical music,' then there's not much else we can do about that. You know how you see these pianos in tube stations? Well, if someone sat down at one and played this piece, I could imagine the entire building coming to a stop. It's not that it's particularly flashy – it's just extremely beautiful, starting slowly then building up to what is probably Rachmaninov at his most hypnotic and poignant.

BEN EALOVEGA, GETTY

Dmitri Shostakovich Symphony No. 10 – *Allegro*

Some assume that classical music is the kind of thing you have playing really softly in the dentist's office: dry and evocative of something old fashioned or high class. But I don't think anyone could think that of the second movement of Shostakovich's Tenth Symphony, which is just about the most head-banging piece of classical music we've got. I guess I can picture people saying, 'Well, I don't like it.' But I think everyone would get something out of it, and I can see it changing a lot of people's understanding of the kind of power and ferocity that one can experience in orchestral music.

Richard Strauss *Also sprach Zarathustra*

This is one of those pieces that often appears on lists of '100 Favourite Classical Tunes'. But most people only know the first minute-and-a-half (see p38), which is a shame because the piece as a whole demonstrates how classical music can have this incredible sense of arc and narrative. And the ending is so wonderfully ambiguous. For someone used to classical music in elevators, it would be amazing to listen to the whole piece and to finish on this unanswered question. It would be hard to find that kind of emotional outcome in music of any other genre.

Sergei Prokofiev *Romeo and Juliet*

Anyone whose perception of classical music is people in powdered wigs playing music in the corner of a party would be astonished to know that music can be as descriptive as Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet* – a piece that tells the story with so much detail and drama, and yet no words, that listening to it is like watching a movie. I had a crazy experience a long time ago, when I was jetlagged almost to the point of hallucination, and I listened to the entire ballet straight through. It was like watching a movie in my head and it was wild.

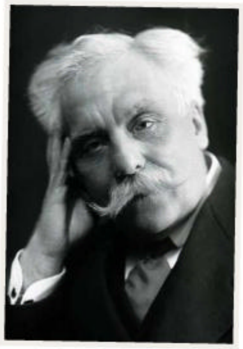
Ottorino Respighi *Pines of Rome*

I think everyone should have the experience of attending a live performance of this piece. It's so colourful, so exciting, so loud, so beautiful and so evocative. It blurs the lines harmonically between what we think of as classical music and what we think of as cinematic and popular music. And it's such a spectacle, featuring a huge number of trumpets as well as the organ. Overall, it's the kind of piece where, if you found yourself looking around at the end of the concert, you'd see everybody looking happy. And that can only be a good thing.

Gabriel Fauré Requiem – 'In Paradisum'

A teacher of mine once said that the most incredible thing about Bach was that every note sounds inevitable. And yet, if you listen to Bach's music, then stop the recording and see if you can figure out what comes next: you'll always be wrong. The same is true of this piece: it sounds so deceptively simple, like something that has always existed. And I can't think of any piece more beautiful than this one. If I gave it to someone who insisted they didn't like classical music, and they said, 'No, that's not for me,' I'd have to say, 'Well I gave it my best shot.'

Interview by Hannah Nepilova



Champion for the cause: James Ehnes selects classical works of irresistible appeal; (opposite) Rachmaninov (top) and Fauré (below)

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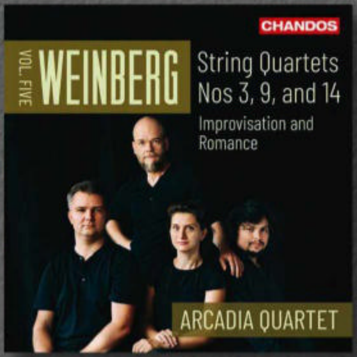
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Richard Morrison

Engaging with classical music takes work – and it's not elitist to say so

Elsewhere in this issue, Ariane Todes writes about what she calls a 'taboo' subject: being bored in a concert of classical music (see p58). It's an intriguing matter. The natural impulse when your mind starts wandering in a concert is to blame the music or performers. But remember Dylan Thomas's remark: 'Someone's boring me. I think it's me.' In other words, is the source of boredom what's going on (or not going on) inside your own head?

Ours is an age that likes easy answers. Social media is full of people who apparently have a quick solution for every problem, even though they have no relevant expertise. Inevitably, the cultural world is affected too. Superficial assessments and instant verdicts are the modern way. If a piece of art or music eludes immediate understanding, we label it 'boring' and move on. In the words of another Welsh poet, WH Davies, 'We have no time to stand and stare.' Or think we don't.

A notable effect of this is that we seek easy ways into classical music. One way is to judge a piece simply subjectively – by how much it 'moves us'. Another way is through biography or history: what does this piece tell us about the composer's state of mind or the era in which it was written? And a third way is via razzle-dazzle: we are thrilled not so much by the music as by the virtuosity required to perform it.

All these entry-points have merit. But a lot of first-rate classical music, especially chamber music, resists being approached like this. It doesn't immediately convey an emotional state that shakes or shocks. It doesn't evoke revolution, war or the inner turmoil of a lovelorn composer. Nor does it require flashy showmanship from those playing it. What it requires are listeners who can aurally 'read' its musical language and grammar, and how its architecture is constructed. If listeners don't have that ability, they may well find their minds wandering.

The trouble is, teaching that particular way of listening – of being able to appreciate subtle shifts in harmony and tonality, or how ideas are bounced around and transformed, as if in conversation – is now regarded (even in university music departments, let alone schools) as terribly old-fashioned, even irrelevant. Far sexier to talk about Florence Price's struggle for recognition in 20th-century America, or the riot on the first night of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*, or which distant love affair lurks behind those mysterious asterisks in Elgar's *Enigma Variations*, or how the entire canon of great composers needs to be 'decolonised'. Those are topics that instantly grab attention. Whereas how a composer such as Brahms subtly tweaks what very old music teachers still call 'sonata form' would be appreciated these days, I would say, only by a tiny percentage of any audience.

> A lot of first-rate music doesn't immediately convey an emotional state of shakes or shocks

Somehow, we have to give the audiences of today, and particularly tomorrow, the confidence and tools to analyse music they are hearing. The first step (perhaps the most difficult one) is for teachers, parents and those who write or broadcast about music to accept that serious classical music operates very differently from pop music. On the whole its timespans are much longer and its harmonic ambition considerably greater, meaning its material requires more organisation. That makes many more demands on the listener.

Treating music as a 'fun pastime' is OK. But with more demanding music it only gets you so far, as performer or listener. Unfortunately, in the UK we now have an educational establishment that greatly values STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering, mathematics), yet is paradoxically unwilling to teach music with the same emphasis on intellectual rigour.

This isn't the plea for us to turn back the clock and hand out Donald Tovey's rigorous analyses of symphonic form to GCSE music students (as I was force-fed when I was 14). But it is a suggestion that we don't dismiss a lot of fine classical music as 'boring' because, for whatever reason, we are letting it wash over us, rather than really engaging with it. Perhaps the music really is boring. Or perhaps it's a case of 'someone's boring me - I think it's me'.

There are plenty of excellent books around that explain how to listen – really listen, with our brains as well as our ears. But these days it's regarded as 'elitist' even to suggest that audiences do a bit of work themselves. A shame. Those who make the effort often find themselves unlocking a whole new level of musical understanding.

Richard Morrison is chief music critic and a columnist of The Times

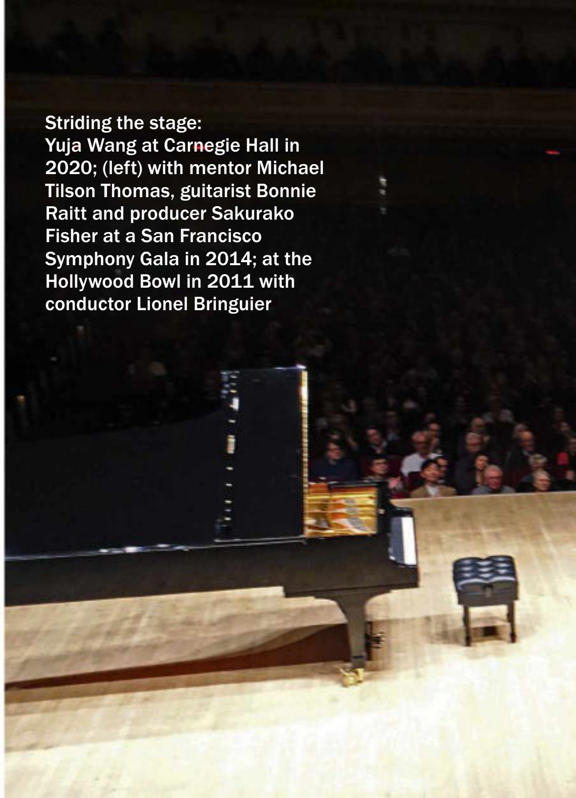
A shining superstar: piano virtuoso Yuja Wang has been dazzling crowds for over two decades

The Accidental Pianist

After two decades of gracing stages around the globe, piano superstar Yuja Wang reflects on a glittering career. Yet, as she tells Clive Paget, becoming one of the world's most recognised and celebrated artists was never a forgone conclusion

Equilibrium is important for Yuja Wang, whether that means balancing the physical demands of some of the toughest nuts in the classical repertoire with the poise required to reveal the music's inner poetry or matching the needs of a busy schedule with domesticity and downtime. And yet, there's nothing contrived or calculated about the path the turbo-charged Chinese virtuoso has trodden to date, as she readily admits. 'You know, I didn't really think of it as a career,' she reflects. 'I never really know what I want to do. Piano was like a side thing. It just happened.' ➤

JULIA WESELY



Striding the stage: Yuja Wang at Carnegie Hall in 2020; (left) with mentor Michael Tilson Thomas, guitarist Bonnie Raitt and producer Sakurako Fisher at a San Francisco Symphony Gala in 2014; at the Hollywood Bowl in 2011 with conductor Lionel Bringuier

WANG IS RELAXED, chatting over the phone from her Manhattan apartment where she is enjoying the dog days of a coveted Christmas staycation ahead of concerts in Paris. She's smart, thoughtful and often disarmingly funny. Just when you think she's accepting an artistic accolade, she'll burst the bubble with a cheeky aside. She laughs a lot, thinks on her feet, and has a ready supply of colourful phrases with which she enjoys peppering her conversation.

As it happens, she's in a reflective mood, describing herself more than once as middle-aged, despite having just turned 38. It's often revealing: 'All I wanted to do, even at Curtis, was to impress my teachers or please others,' she shares. 'Finding pleasure or joy – that's my way of making people happy and expressing myself.' It's the same today, she muses, but subtly different. 'Not in the way I used to as a teenager,' she says. 'Now I'm also trying to find what it is I am expressing. Back then it was more like a personal grievance or a breakup, or whatever. Now it's like, how about other people? How about society?'

Wang was born in Beijing in 1987. She has credited her father, a percussionist, with steadying her tendency to rhythmic excess. As a child, her mother, a dancer, encouraged her in calligraphy and painting. Taken along to rehearsals, the infant Yuja preferred listening to the music to watching the dancers. By six she was picking out things on the piano at home, a talent that became a passion. Within a year she was taking lessons and giving performances – check out YouTube to see the pigtailed eight-year-old playing Chopin's C sharp minor waltz with preternatural grace.

Back in the 1990s, China was in the throes of Lang Lang fever, but Wang was never really interested in acquiring pop-star status or piano as a competitive sport (nor, incidentally, is she one to swoon or showboat at the keyboard). Drawn to a more respectful approach, she knuckled down at Beijing's Central Conservatory of Music before relocating in 1999 to Canada, where she became the youngest ever student at Mount Royal Conservatory.

In 2002, aged just 15, she won the Aspen Music Festival's Concerto Competition and landed a sought-after place at Philadelphia's Curtis Institute of Music, where she studied with Gary Graffman and Leon Fleisher. Far from finding the move traumatic, Wang, already used to a solitary existence of study and practice, took to North American life like a duck to water (later in our interview she describes herself as both introvert and extrovert).

Aged 16, she caught the attention of conductor Michael Tilson Thomas, or MTT as he's known, who took her under his wing. In interviews, he has admired her ability to entertain yet engage the attention of serious music lovers. In one instance, he likened her to a racehorse straining for the off. In another, he recalled her standing up and turning during a performance of Shostakovich's First Piano Concerto before playing an enormous tone cluster 'with her derrière'.

A roll call of her early inspirations includes Evgeny Kissin and Maurizio Pollini. During her time at Curtis, it was Vladimir Horowitz, Alfred Cortot and Artur Schnabel. 'Those are my teachers' teachers: Leon Fleisher studied with Schnabel and Gary Graffman was with Horowitz,' she enthuses. 'But Horowitz always, and also Rachmaninov as a pianist were a huge influence, and sometimes even Kempff for Schubert, you know.'

Later she WhatsApps me a photo of Cortot accompanied by Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli. She'd forgotten to mention

GETTY

‘I am exceeding what I expected from my career when I was 20-something’

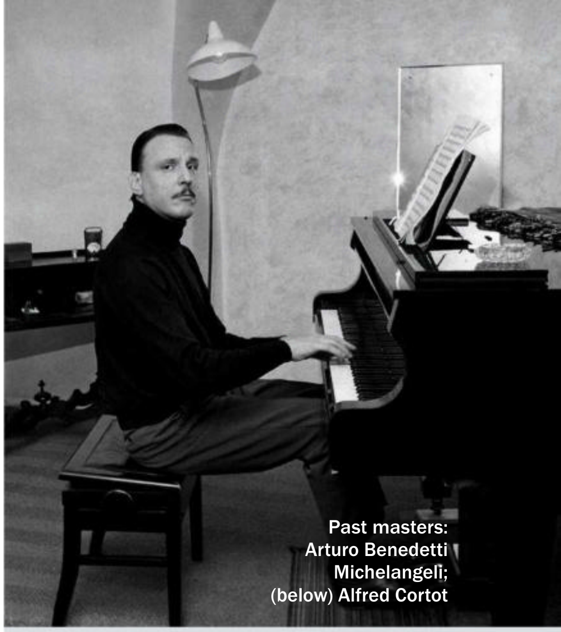
the latter in her list of heroes. ‘Loved his Rach 4,’ she texts. When I express admiration at the Italian’s sharp tailoring, she shoots back: ‘I know right? I wonder if people asked about his style etc. lol. Impeccable.’ It’s a perfect riposte to the salacious critic who considers her sassy fashion sense more relevant than her art.

When I first interviewed her in 2014, Wang came across as a breath of fresh air with a hectic performance diary that was constantly clashing with the mundanity of managing her laundry. One upside of the pandemic was a chance to take a well-earned break from piano and go for walks in the newly discovered fresh air of New York. ‘I’m really close to Carnegie Hall – very clichéd,’ she chuckles. ‘I love nature, so I plant and cook, extremely domestic stuff, because I’ve been travelling for years. Making the interior of my home really nice is peaceful and stabilising. Very boring.’

Early on, Wang acquired an enviable reputation as a jump-in for the great and the good. It got her noticed as a fearless and unflappable star in the making. In 2007, she got her big break deputising for Martha Argerich playing Tchaikovsky’s First Piano Concerto. ‘With Martha it was like, “I’m tired… do you want to play with the Boston Symphony for me?”,’ she told me previously. ‘I’m like, “Of course – wrong question!”’

In 2009 she signed with Deutsche Grammophon, a deal that generated six albums in as many years. The 2011 release of Rachmaninov’s Second Concerto and the *Paganini Rhapsody* with Claudio Abbado and the Mahler Chamber Orchestra earned her a first Grammy nod.

On reflection, she feels blessed. ‘I think I am exceeding what I expected when I was 20-something,’ she says. ‘Just meeting Murray Perahia, having MTT as my



Past masters: Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli; (below) Alfred Cortot

Pianistic perfection

Yuja Wang’s heroes

In a black-and-white photo taken in Brescia in 1948, Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli stares into the camera, supporting a slightly frail-looking Alfred Cortot. The older man’s hand grips the younger man’s elbow, a touching picture of mutual respect. The Italian’s tailored jacket and tie contrasts with the French pianist’s battered hat and bowtie, reflecting the generation gap. Yet despite differences, they hold a special place in the hearts of many pianists today, including Yuja Wang.

Cortot, born 1877, was known for his expressive interpretations of Romantic repertoire. It’s less well known that in 1902 he conducted the Paris premiere of *Götterdämmerung*. In 1925, he made the world’s first commercial electrical recording of classical music playing Chopin and Schubert. After WWII, he was found guilty of collaborating with the Vichy government and banned from performing for a year.

Michelangeli, born 1920, became famous for his technical precision and crystalline tone. When he won the Geneva International Music Competition at the age of 19 in 1939, Cortot proclaimed him to be ‘a new Liszt’ and Benito Mussolini gave him a teaching position in Bologna. His students include two of Wang’s modern heroes: Martha Argerich, who famously received just four lessons in 18 months, and, for six months, Maurizio Pollini.

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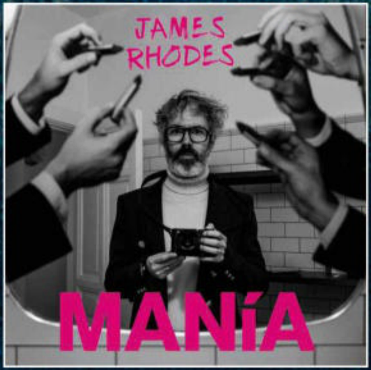
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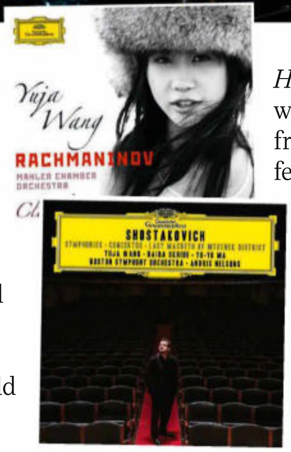

In full bloom: (above) with Gustavo Dudamel at the Vienna Philharmonic Summer Night Concert, 2019; (right) early and recent releases

mentor, playing for Radu Lupu and Kissin – can you imagine, my chilhood idol? – and meeting Argerich, it's like, "Wow, life is incredible." As a child I was seeing their faces as gods on CD covers.'

Then there have been the big-ticket appearances, including in 2023 the herculean feat of playing all four Rachmaninov concertos and the *Paganini Rhapsody* at Carnegie Hall. Reviewing the four-and-a-half-hour marathon event, *The New York Times* admired the clarity and poetry she brought despite the music's exceptional demands. 'She played with heft but not bombast, sentiment but not schmaltz,' wrote Zachary Woolfe, adding that: 'Her prevailing style is sprightly, which is why the concert didn't feel like eating five slices of chocolate cake in a row.'

When it comes to contemporary music, her current go-to is John Adams. In 2019, the American composer wrote a concerto for her, wittily entitled *Must the Devil Have All the Good Tunes.* The first half of her most recent London appearance – a five-star duo recital at the Royal Festival Hall with Icelandic pianist and DG stablemate Víkingur Ólafsson – culminated in a barnstorming account of Adams's riotous *Hallelujah Junction*. 'By the end, when, after all this counting and freaking out, it comes to D major, I felt really proud to be American. A very rare moment!' she laughs. 'I felt like finally American music has its own voice. All the principles of the Viennese world, and Boulez talking about serialism, all of that made it into [Adams's] own voice, like he internalised it. Rather than, "Oh, this contemporary music, it's so hard to listen to," it is so enjoyable. And it makes sense. It moves you in a bigger-than-life way, like all things American.'

Her latest project for DG, recorded with the Boston Symphony Orchestra under Andris Nelsons, couples Shostakovich's two piano concertos with a selection of the composer's preludes and fugues. When she was younger, Wang confesses, she suspected Shostakovich of recycling in terms of both music and ideology. 'But when I really pulled myself away from the reading of his life and his music, it's much more enriched and complex than that,' she remarks. The First Concerto, with its prominent trumpet part, she describes as 'pure fun', though she also enjoys its sarcastic side. 'It's really hard to put together,' she admits. 'It switches mood and temperament so much, so abruptly. What is he rumbling about? It's almost abstruse. There's a recording of Shostakovich playing it,' she adds. 'People think, "Oh you should take time, there

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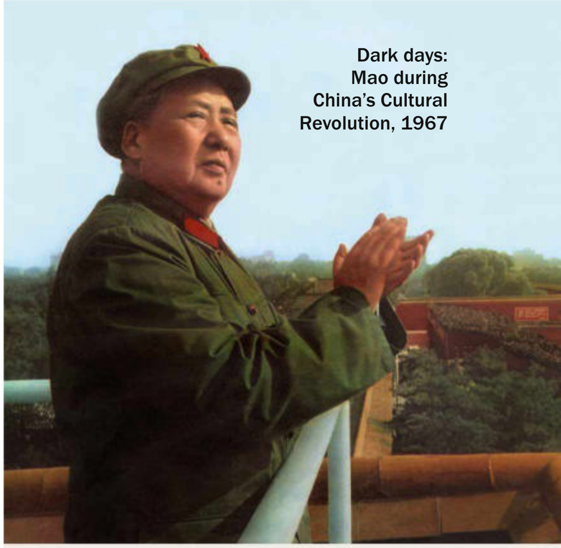

Dark days: Mao during China's Cultural Revolution, 1967

From Mao to millions

China's piano rebirth

Yuja Wang is, of course, by no means alone among Chinese-born pianists in enjoying a major international career. As well as fellow superstars Lang Lang and Yundi Li, the likes of Sa Chen, Di Xiao and, as part of the Sitkovetsky Trio, Wu Qian have all become familiar faces on stages and in recording studios across the globe. Around 50 million children in China are estimated to be learning the piano, and sales of the instrument are booming.

Turn the clock back 50 years, however, and all this would have been simply unthinkable. When, in 1966, Chairman Mao Zedong launched his Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution with the aim of stamping out bourgeois elements from the country, western classical music and those who performed it were inevitably targeted. As Mao and his notorious 'Gang of Four' – Zhang Chunqiao, Yao Wenyuan, Wang Hongwen and Mao's wife Jiang Qing – unleashed their new cultural regime, listening to music by composers such as Beethoven and Debussy became a political crime, conductors and music conservatory professors were imprisoned, and western instruments, especially pianos, were publicly destroyed. To replace the old musical order, new operas and songs glorifying the leader and his ideals were commissioned.

All this rapidly changed with the death of Mao in 1976 and the subsequent arrest of the Gang of Four, but the damage inflicted over the previous ten years took much longer to repair – when, in 1979, violinist Isaac Stern arrived in Shanghai on a high-profile concert tour, finding a single playable piano for his performance proved nearly impossible.

'A solitary job': for all her success, Wang craves life's simple pleasures

is all this suffering and stuff," and then he flies straight through the cadenza like he has some nervous wreck going on.'

The Second is close to her heart. Along with Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto No. 2, she chose it for the reopening of Carnegie Hall after 15 months of lockdown. 'Shostakovich wrote it for his son, so there's the fatherly love for a little eight year-old,' she explains. 'My favourite is the second movement. It's so tender. It's like, "Oh, you do know how to write beautiful music, you just choose to be edgy."'

These days she finds tackling new repertoire to be very different. 'The things I learned before 20 just stayed in the brain cells somewhere, internalised. Whereas things I learned two years ago, I look at the score and it's like, "Have I seen this music before?" You have to accept that and look forward. With every change there's a pro and con.' The challenge in life, she observes, is figuring out how to swap those inconvenient cons for new-found pros.

Performance-wise she expresses a preference nowadays for recitals where she can enjoy complete autonomy and the pleasure of coming up with ideas. She's good at it as well, to judge by the recent release of her 2022 Vienna recital where she fuses the likes of Albéniz, Scriabin, Kapustin, Brahms, Ligeti, Beethoven and Glass into a remarkably seamless whole.

'The longer you are in this business, the more people hope you will give them ideas,' she says. 'I was good at taking orders when I was younger, but now when I'm giving ideas to people they say, "Well, she's getting very bossy." So, I have to give ideas but not be bossy. It's a fine line.'

'Our industry needs to feel live, like jazz where it's made on the spot'

One of her increasing frustrations is having to plan her life two or three years ahead rather than being free to adopt a nimbler approach. 'It feels very restraining to the artist, especially when big venues want you to submit the programme a year-and-a-half ago and make a big deal if you change,' she says. 'I think giving it two months before would be much more alive, because this industry needs to feel live, like in jazz where everything's made on the spot. It's much more exciting than, "Okay, here's a poem I memorised, and I'll recite for you." It's just a different energy.'

As for reviews, she doesn't read them – 'unless someone told me there was a really good one,' she laughs. 'I feel like reviews or audience reception are already decided, so it really doesn't do justice. I could play really badly, but it's a big event and they can't say anything negative so it's a good review. I'd rather read Salman Rushdie or something.' And secret pleasures? 'Admiring my own dresses,' she laughs. 'I go to my closet sometimes and think "Wow, that's really beautiful! I wore that."'

Looking back, I ask, what notes might today's Yuja Wang give to her younger self? 'Oh man, I wish I was 70 and could tell myself what I should do right now,' she jokes, before turning serious. 'I would probably make different recordings, and I would probably have better planning. Other than that, maybe don't play the piano, do something else,' she laughs, 'because that seems to be the pull to my middle-aged self. There are so many other beauties I enjoy in the world and piano is a very solitary job.'

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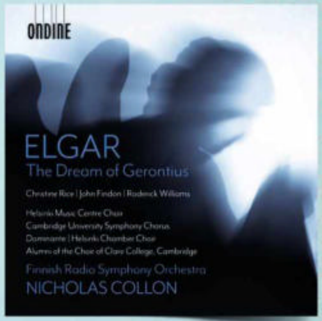
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Breaking the mould: Charles Hazlewood (pictured below) and his Paraorchestra have won the RPS Ensemble award

RPS Music Awards 2025

Rebecca Franks meets Paraorchestra artistic director and founder Charles Hazlewood, who speaks about inspiring disabled musicians around the country

Ensemble
Paraorchestra

'All my life I've been doing my little bit to try and move the orchestral sector on and bring about change, and I've met a lot of resistance along the way. But I've been very comfortable being on the periphery, a little guerilla force, so for a project of mine to be celebrated by the establishment is a new sensation,' says conductor Charles Hazlewood, who set up the Paraorchestra back in 2011, after becoming aware of the lack of opportunities for disabled musicians. 'Don't get me wrong, we are so delighted, flattered and honoured that the RPS has recognised us. And, of course, it does a great deal for us to win such an accolade. But we're all a bit shocked.'

Yet if being awarded the RPS's Ensemble award has taken aback the Paraorchestra's founder, it may be less of a surprise to anyone who has watched (or, indeed, heard) the group blazing a trail across the UK's musical landscape. Paraorchestra has shaken up the traditional orchestral model, whether that's by bringing karaoke to the streets with its show *Smoosh!*, working with assistive technology to support its players, or providing resources to develop fresh work and grow careers.

Ever since its debut at the 2012 Paralympics, the Paraorchestra has gone from strength to strength and is now made up of around 50 musicians who identify as disabled, deaf or neurodivergent, playing alongside non-disabled musicians. In 2022, Arts Council England quadrupled Paraorchestra's funding. It took about six months for the group to scale up, and the effects have been transformative, says CEO Jonathan Harper. 'It became like this rocket ship, with project after project. *Trip the Light Fantastic* was that first moment of investing more money into making really stellar, innovative orchestral works.'

Harper is talking about the ambitious multi-media performance given by Paraorchestra to open the newly refurbished Bristol Beacon concert hall in late 2023. *Trip the Light Fantastic* was an exhilarating collaboration with electronic artist Surgeon's Girl, projectionists Limbic Cinema and Paraorchestra composer Oliver Vibrans. 'It was fraught with

ELJAY BRISS, SKY ARTS, VENETIA JOLLANDS, DEJAN MRDJA

jeopardy. Many things could have gone wrong but didn't. And the people of Bristol seemed delighted with it,' says Hazlewood – and he's talking from experience, as the city is the home of Paraorchestra.

Paraorchestra was also on home ground when it made its debut at the Proms, which visited Bristol for the first time in 2024. *The Virtuous Circle* mused on the theme of teamwork, weaving together Mozart's Symphony No. 40 performed from memory and new music by Vibrans, with choreography, lighting and spoken word. 'It was another amazing moment when I had to pinch myself. This fledgling thing I started at the Paralympics with a view to making a political point, and hopefully to bring about some kind of change in hearts and minds... the very idea it could be playing a fully-fledged Prom was outside my dream bucket,' says Hazlewood.

> 'We're not bound by a corporate handbook. We focus on all the needs of our players'

The performance was wildly creative, and that on-stage spirit is matched by creative thinking behind the scenes. 'We're not bound by a corporate handbook of how an orchestra should run,' says Harper. 'We've developed a model where you're really focused on what people need. It's person-centered, and if they are disabled, it is all part and parcel of what we do. [We combine that] with the aim of being super-ambitious and exceptional, so the performances are emotional and glorious.

'Twenty-three per cent of the population identifies as disabled and I think maybe nine per cent of the arts workforce,' adds Harper. 'We still haven't moved the dial beyond two per cent in orchestras.' Yet while the rest of the industry is slow to catch up, the Paraorchestra musicians are getting stuck in to ever more ambitious work, with *The Bradford Progress* coming up this year as part of the 2025 City of Culture events. 'Day after day Paraorchestra brings good news,' says Hazlewood, 'and in terms of my working life, it's the happiest time I've ever had.'

And the winners are...

This year's Royal Philharmonic Society Awards recipients

Chamber-Scale Composition Sarah Lianne Lewis *– letting the light in*

Lewis's work for solo prepared piano is a reflection on new motherhood, premiered by Siwan Rhys. Lewis explores navigating change, balancing a freelance career with caregiving, and its impact on her disability.

Conductor Kazuki Yamada

Music director of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra since 2023, Yamada is also artistic and music director of Orchestre Philharmonique de Monte-Carlo. The Japanese-born conductor continues to work and perform in his homeland with the NHK Symphony Orchestra every season too.

Gamechanger NMC Recordings

Recognised for 'inspirational work breaking new ground in classical music', this year's Gamechanger is NMC Recordings, which for over 35 years has been dedicated to 'the promotion of exceptional contemporary classical music from Britain and Ireland'.

Impact Re:Discover Festival – Streetwise Opera

A celebration of African and Caribbean heritage through the voices of people with experience of homelessness, Re:Discover led to the co-creation of three short operas by 100 participants, performed across London, Manchester and Nottingham.

Inspiration Open Arts Community Choir

This dynamic and inclusive choir from Belfast, directed by Beverley McGeown, demonstrates how disabled and non-disabled people from diverse backgrounds can come together through the medium of song to stage high-quality performances across a wide range of genres.

Instrumentalist Laura van der Heijden (cellist)

Since winning BBC Young Musician in 2012 at the age of 15, Van der Heijden (pictured above) has developed a thoughtful career, combining solo and chamber collaboration, premiere performances and acclaimed recordings for Chandos.

Large-Scale Composition Katherine Balch – *whisper concerto*

Named after the 'whisper cadenza' of Ligeti's Cello Concerto and dedicated to soloist Zlatomir Fung, this piece 'is not meant as a showcase for cello alone, but for the orchestra as a whole, which reacts to and augments the soloist'.

Opera and Music Theatre *Death in Venice* – Welsh National Opera

WNO's mesmerising 2023-24 production of Britten's classic opera brought together a stellar team, including tenor Mark Le Brocq, baritone Roderick Williams, conductor Leo Hussain and director Olivia Fuchs.

Series and Events The Cumnock Tryst

Taking its name from a setting of William Soutar's love poem 'The Tryst' by James MacMillan, the Scottish festival brings together music lovers from far and wide for four packed days of delightful performance.

Singer Claire Booth (soprano)

With over 40 world premieres by such luminaries as Birtwistle, Benjamin, Carter and Knussen to her name, Claire Booth has graced opera and concert stages in the UK and abroad in a wide range of repertoire, from Monteverdi to Britten.

Storytelling Classical Africa – BBC Radio 3

In Radio 3's *Sunday Feature*, South African double bassist, writer and broadcaster Leon Bosch asks whether we can define a distinctively African form of Western classical music – drawing on his own, sometimes harrowing, experiences.

Young Artist GBSR Duo

George Barton (percussion) and Siwan Rhys (piano, pictured left) have built a reputation for fearless and boundary-defying performances, with an emphasis on commissioning, repertoire-building and cross-genre collaboration with such names as Oliver Leith, CHAINES and Angharad Davies.

The art of sound

Over 40 years, the producer Andrew Keener has enhanced hundreds of recordings with his skills. Anthony Cheng uncovers the secrets of his craft

I enter a windowless room on the ground floor of Andrew Keener's home, tucked away on a street in New Malden, London. CDs and books fill almost all the spaces. Stacks of them on the coffee table tower above me, including CDs he's produced himself. In front of loudspeakers, in the middle of the room a long wooden desk is stationed bearing laptop and headphones and a laid open, heavily annotated score with all the colours of the rainbow marked across the pages. The room exudes the aura of a command centre where all the artistic magic happens. He ushers me in with a wide open-palmed gesture. 'Welcome to my safe space! It's my retreat. It's a room where I can leave worries at the door.'

This office has been Keener's workstation for the first editing stage of his productions for decades. The relentless fine-tuning in this room of the majority of his 1600-odd recordings has earned him, among other recognitions, a 2003 Grammy for Best Chamber Music Performance with the Takács Quartet in Beethoven.

It was Christmas 1967. This was the year in which Keener's early passion for records ignited as a 13 year-old. His Welsh working-class, music-loving parents stuffed a *Gramophone* magazine in his Christmas stocking. He opened the issue and was confronted with an assortment of record reviews – a type of subjective and analytical writing he never knew existed. Flipping through the pages of the magazine he mused, 'Well, if it's on record, it must be good, mustn't it?' The concept of a 'critic' – whether record, concert or restaurant – was completely alien to him. 'The moment was damascene. I fell madly in love with records.' From then on, most of his pocket money would be earmarked for one thing: buying records. 'He's always been a serious record collector and acutely aware of recording history,' says Marc-André Hamelin, the virtuoso French-Canadian pianist and Keener's long-time collaborator on his Hyperion albums.

Comparing recordings of the same pieces by different artists is what gripped Keener's intense focus the most. Questions swirled in his mind… Why is this recording of the Elgar Cello Concerto different to that one, du Pré versus Fournier? Why is the cello more forward in that recording and not this one? He admits that early on, he became somewhat 'insufferable' when it came to the hierarchical quality of specific recordings by varying artists and producers. He advised his parents on what should and shouldn't be considered among their small classical music record collection at home. 'Oh, you don't want to listen to this, Mum and Dad. You don't want the Karajan version of Beethoven's "Pastoral"; the Kleiber one is much more refined.'

> 'Reading reviews for the first time was life changing. I fell madly in love with records'

After graduation from Edinburgh University in 1975, he began an 18-month stint as a music teacher in Scotland. 'I drifted mindlessly into teacher training because I admired my music teacher in Barry Boys' Comprehensive School. He taught me form and harmony. I wanted to

ANTHONY CHENG

A master at work: legendary record producer Andrew Keener studies musical scores in his windowless studio – his 'safe space' – in New Malden, southwest London

emulate him.' The trials of classroom teaching drove out all his passion for the job. 'I wanted the students to love my art as much as I did. But that is not the essence of great teaching. It is to lead rather than impose. I was a terrible teacher.'

One day during lunch break, he secretly ran outside to a phone box. He pushed in a few coins and punched in a number. It started to dial.

He rang up *Hi-Fi News & Record Review* and said down the phone, 'You don't know me, but the conductor André Previn is here in Scotland on his tour. He's agreed for me to interview him.' He hadn't. Keener then went to Edinburgh's Usher Hall and approached maestro Previn in the rehearsal interval. 'Mr Previn, you don't know me, but I have a commission to interview you.' This was all untrue too. 'But he was very sweet and gave me an interview,' Keener reflects. This became one of his first published pieces.

Taking the plunge to leave the teaching profession was overwhelmingly attractive. He was 'drastically unhappy' teaching and was compelled to do something radical to enter the recording industry. He packed up his bags, bundling all his 'worldly belongings' into a white van and saw the Scottish education system recede in the rear-view mirror. Next destination: London.

He shared a 'madhouse' in Clapham with a fellow classmate at Edinburgh University, conductor Donald Runnicles, who was now studying at the London Opera Centre. What was Keener to do now in a new world, a new city of opportunities? He had a coffee meeting in the diary with Runnicles, but his friend was nowhere to be seen at the scheduled time.

'I've never been so glad for someone to have been late, because I went into this record shop. They gave me an interview.' But a week later they wrote back to apologise. They told him that they couldn't offer the salary that he was making as a teacher in Edinburgh. But did it deter him? Not in the slightest. Keener, with determination to never set foot in the classroom again, wrote back immediately. 'I don't care what you pay me. When can I start?' Within weeks, he was formally an employee of EMG Handmade Gramophones. It was his passport to the exciting world of London – and the record industry.

Working at EMG deepened his love of records. The store was a meeting point between the aspiring and the stars of his industry: Robert Layton, John Lade and Simon Foster would come in. Through these connections, he began attending recording sessions to learn the art of producing. Observing with a watchful eye,

'Pertinent comments': Julian Lloyd Webber was impressed by Keener

A young upstart?

Keener's first sessions

Andrew Keener's ears whirr at high gear in the recording booth – and he has always been a careful and sensitive listener, even during his very earliest days of attending recording sessions before taking on his official role as a record producer.

Renowned British cellist Julian Lloyd Webber (pictured above) was in awe of Keener's aural abilities during their early encounters. 'We first met when he turned pages for my pianist during a recording of Debussy and Rachmaninov sonatas in London,' he remembers, adding that the Rachmaninov was incredibly difficult to balance between the piano and cello.

In between page turning, and listening intently to the session, Keener was able to give some invaluable feedback: 'He made very pertinent comments, despite him not being the producer on the day. And I have to say he was absolutely right.'

But to this day, Keener still wonders how he was confident enough to pipe up and be so vocal. 'There was a producer there already. I wonder why he didn't kill me!' he marvels.

GETTY, DAVE POWELL

The art of tactful collaboration: Keener in the studio with pianist Boris Giltburg; (right) conductor Donald Runnicles, with whom he shared a flat in the early days

Keener pondered to himself, 'Gosh, that's what producers do? Person sits in a box, requesting retakes and offering praise – that looks so easy. Wrong!'

Ted Perry, a frequenter at the store, came in one day with news to share – that he had started a new record label, the soon-to-be-renowned Hyperion. 'Do you want a producer?' asked Keener. 1980 was to become the year of his first break.

His first taste of producing was with a British pianist recording all the Chopin *Études*. But he bowed to every one of the artist's wishes. Having dinner with the pianist a week before the sessions: 'I don't want to know about take numbers, Andrew.' 'Of course,' came the reply. 'I also want to jump about from one bar of a piece to a bar in another.' 'Of course.' 'I want these *Études* to be as accurate as Maurizio Pollini's recordings.' 'Of course,' the young Keener reassured the pianist. Now, he would gently insist that there are protocols in sessions. 'But back then, I was in thrall of the artist. That's not to say I am not in thrall of artists now, but I do hope – maybe! – by now I've acquired some sort of technique to offer guidance if it's needed.' After the third day of sessions with the pianist, Keener burst into tears and was driven home by Perry at three in the morning. The recording never saw the light of day. But Perry saw a spark in him. He was given a second chance.

Granular listening – the ability to pinpoint the musical interests in the piece and funnel special attention there – is the hallmark of a great record producer. As a student at secondary school, Keener would borrow scores for works such as Beethoven's quartets. And along with the reel-to-reel tape recorder his parents bought him for Christmas and with a little kazoo, he would blow the notes of each part – first and second violin, viola, and cello – into the tape recorder, overdubbing. 'This is one way of training young ears and knowing the complexity of the score. Of course, I wouldn't have been able to do this with a Mahler Symphony!'

It comes as no surprise that another essential skill for an effective producer is the ability to collaborate. 'Without a good engineer, a producer is lost.' The producer, engineer and artists are in the session for stretches of several days, pushing each other to make the best recordings possible. 'Without people skills in this job, it is worthless,' says Keener. How is this skill developed? Is it a born trait? In part, the roots can be traced back to childhood.

'I was bullied in school very badly. If it did me any good, it was to enable me to see other people's sensitivities. One of the essentials of being a producer is the ability to read the people with whom you're collaborating, to react to them and to behave accordingly.'

And what of Artificial Intelligence, I ask Keener. Will its power encroach upon the record producing world? 'I turned 70 this year. I hope I'm dead when it does,' he replies without missing a beat. 'I find it unsettling.' And some advice for aspiring record producers? 'Know the standard repertoire. There's no better way to engender an artist's trust.'

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In the beginning…

What are the most memorable openings in classical music? We explore 15 of the best known, some of which have entirely outshone the works that follow

WORDS BY: JEREMY POUND AND STEVE WRIGHT

It was the Olympic sprinter Linford Christie who once said that, if you want to win a race, you have to be out of the blocks 'by the "B" of "Bang"'. Similarly, it doesn't hurt for composers to grab the attention with the very first note, locking in the listener from the start. Doing so, however, is something of an art.

In many instances, the first few bars of a piece have enjoyed a level of fame – a cult status, even – that, alas, the rest of the work has failed to match. Others, in contrast, herald masterpieces that have proved very popular in their entirety. Examples of both feature in our selection of 15 of the most memorable openings in classical music, though whittling down the list caused plenty of argument in the *BBC Music* office. We are sure readers will also beg to differ. If so, do tell us...

Beethoven Symphony No. 5

'Da da da DUM. Da da da DUM.' Is there any more instantly recognisable opening in the whole of classical music? Often likened to the sound of fate knocking at the door, the urgent eight-note opening gambit of Beethoven's Fifth grabs the listener by the scruff of the neck – and goes on to drive the whole of the opening movement forward. All four of the Fifth's movements are wondrous in their different ways, but the work owes its status as 'that bit of classical everyone knows' to its opening movement – and, in particular, to that implacable eight-note starting gun.

Orff Carmina Burana

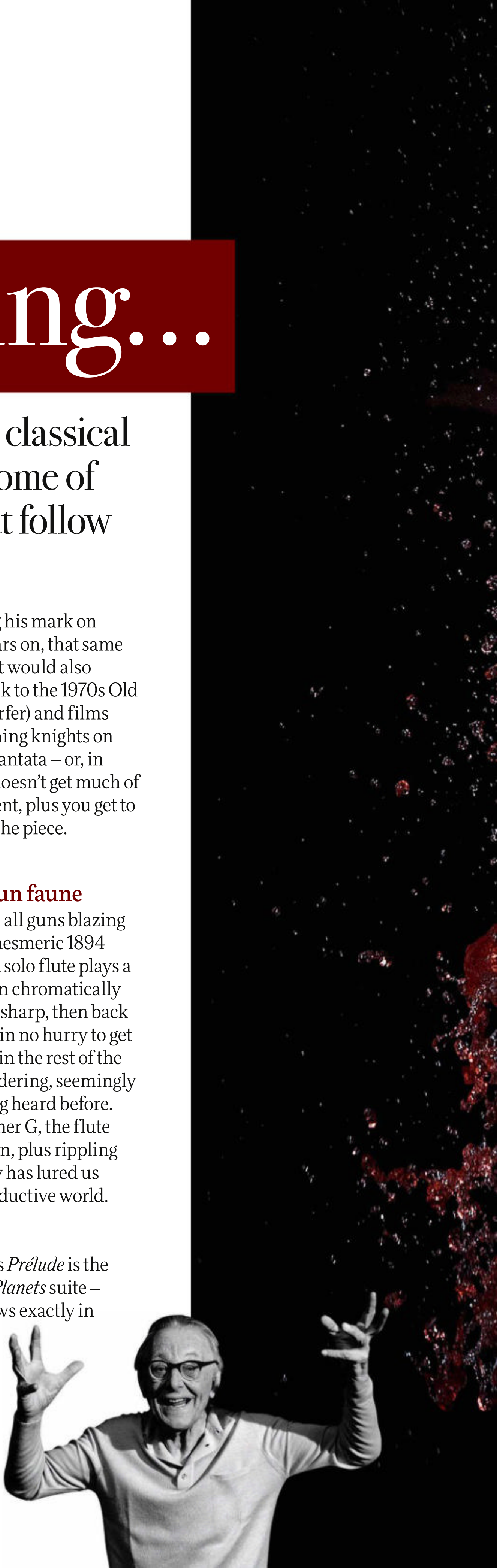
Bom! 'O Fortuna.' Bom! 'Velut Luna.' Bom! 'Statu variabilis...!' With this series of timpani thwacks and belted-out chorus, Carl Orff launched his 1936 cantata, instantly making his mark on the musical world. Just a few bars on, that same opening 'O Fortuna' movement would also provide the thrilling soundtrack to the 1970s Old Spice adverts (big wave plus surfer) and films including 1981's *Excalibur* (shining knights on horseback), but the rest of the cantata – or, in fact, Orff's music in general – doesn't get much of a look in. Still, it's a great moment, plus you get to hear it again at the very end of the piece.

Debussy Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune

A piece doesn't have to come in all guns blazing to make an impact. Take this mesmeric 1894 orchestral poem by Debussy. A solo flute plays a long C sharp, then ambles down chromatically to a G natural, back up to the C sharp, then back down again. Our faun appears in no hurry to get anywhere, as remains the case in the rest of the ten-minute work, whose meandering, seemingly free-form style was like nothing heard before. After briefly lingering on a higher G, the flute hands over to a languorous horn, plus rippling harp. In just four bars, Debussy has lured us magically into his sensuous, seductive world.

Holst The Planets

Quite the opposite of Debussy's *Prélude* is the first movement of Holst's *The Planets* suite – 'Mars, the Bringer of War' knows exactly in which direction it is going. 'Bringer' is the operative word, as Holst doesn't plunge us directly into bloody conflict but hints at its inevitability in the most sinister way – as



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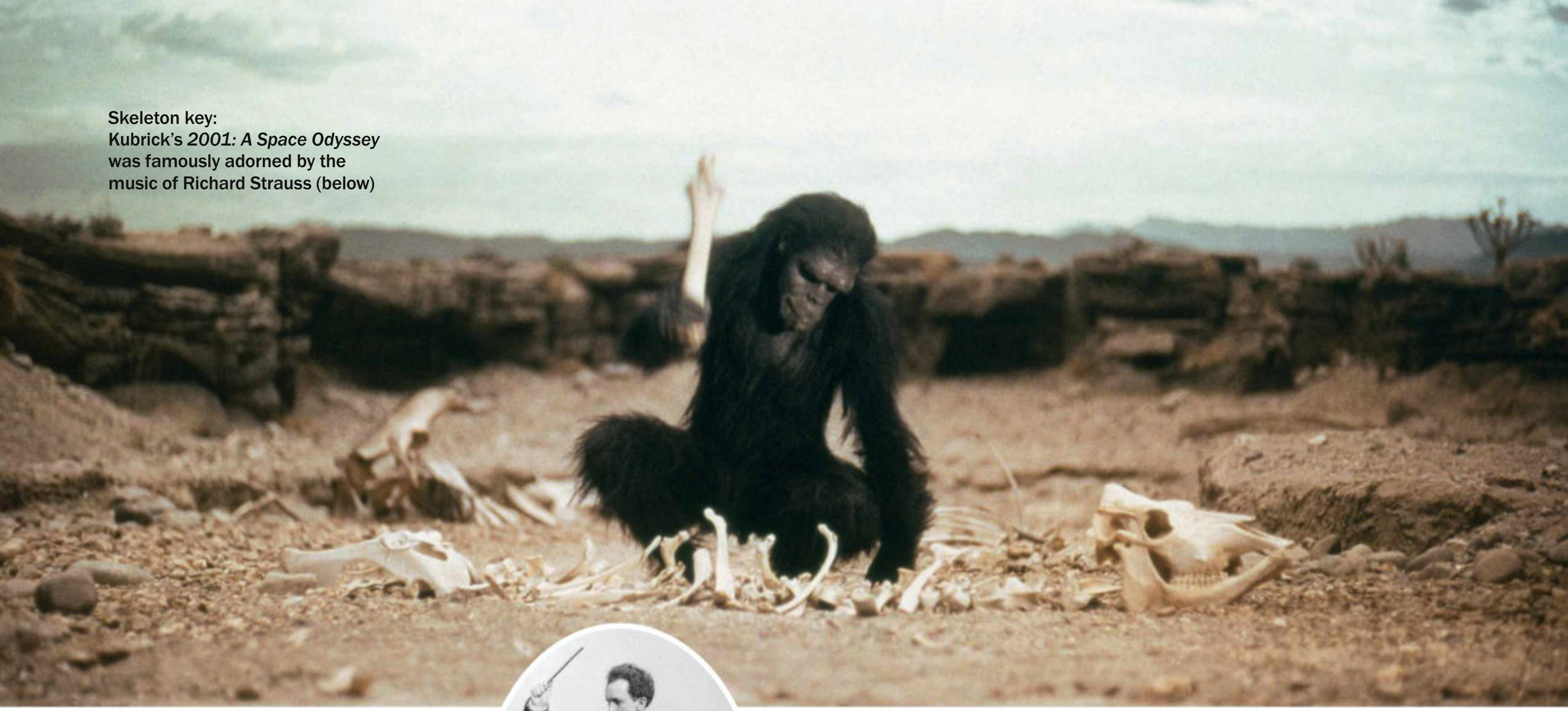
Making a splash:
a member of La Fura dels Baus
in a staged production of Orff's
Carmina Burana, Madrid, 2015;
(below left) Orff himself



Skeleton key:
Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* was famously adorned by the music of Richard Strauss (below)

timpani and strings (using the back of the bow) stab out a persistent, jagged rhythm, bassoons and horns sound an ominous warning call based on the tritone, otherwise known as the 'Devil's interval'. It may begin *piano*, but louder, more brutal things lie ahead.

Elgar Cello Concerto

Written in 1914, Holst's 'Mars' nervously anticipates World War I; at the other end of the conflict, Elgar's Cello Concerto of 1919 wistfully remembers times past and friends lost. The cello soloist's unaccompanied opening chords give an immediate sense of anguish, but it is the gorgeous, haunting melody that follows – hinted at by both cellist and then orchestra before being revealed in its full nobility – that so masterfully captures the time and place in which it was written. From films to spring water adverts, that particular passage has become familiar to millions, leaving the rest of Elgar's fine concerto trailing mournfully in its wake.

Richard Strauss Also sprach Zarathustra

We begin with a mysterious, expectant drone from double bass, contrabassoon and organ. Next comes a majestic, up-surging trumpet motif, symbolising both the rising sun and the upstretched hand of human endeavour. The full orchestra swells dramatically, all thundering timpani rolls and crashing cymbals. Yes, it's hard to match the sense of sheer awe and potential that ushers in Richard Strauss's tone poem *Also sprach Zarathustra*. Its most iconic use was in Stanley Kubrick's 1968 film *2001: A Space Odyssey*, where it served as a potent symbol of human evolution and cosmic mystery.

Picture this:
Rik Mayall in *The New Statesman*, as heralded by Mussorgsky

> 'To the strains of the opening Promenade from Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*, Rik Mayall glowered out from our TV screens'

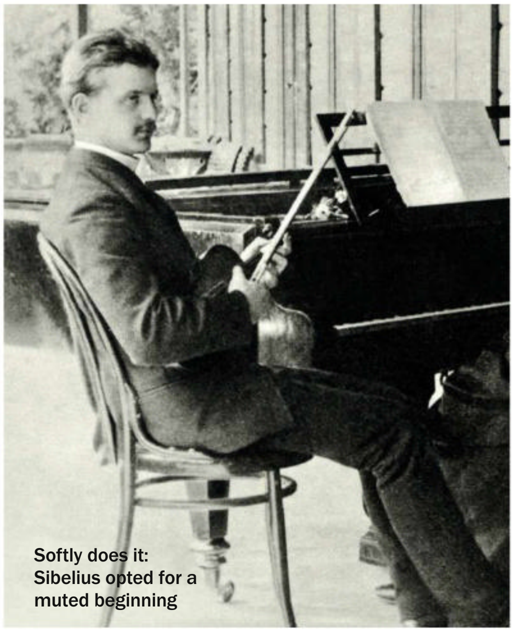
Sibelius Violin Concerto

Among the great Romantic violin concertos, a grand orchestral opening is usually the done thing (think of Brahms or Tchaikovsky, for example). Not so Sibelius's only concerto. Here, the orchestra begins with muted tremolo strings, softly shimmering like a Nordic landscape at dawn. Somewhat tentatively, the violin enters alone with a haunting, brooding theme. As this melody unfolds, it gains in intensity and urgency, while the orchestra remains understated. A masterclass in austere beauty.

Mozart Eine kleine Nachtmusik

Sometimes, the most effective way to begin a piece is with a simple, memorable tune. And

GETTY, ALAMY



Softly does it: Sibelius opted for a muted beginning

in the case of Mozart's 1787 'night music' for chamber ensemble, that opening 'Tum-ti-tum, ti-tum-ti-tum-ti-tum' is, indeed, simplicity itself. It has become a tune that everybody seems to know but, above all the works on this list, we'd venture that it is also the one that most people can readily hum… without being able to name it.

Mussorgsky Pictures at an Exhibition

For a generation of UK TV viewers, the opening of *Pictures at an Exhibition* will forever conjure images of a Brylcreemed, pinstripe-suited Rik Mayall. To the strains of the opening Promenade, Mayall glowered out from our late-1980s screens as Alan B'Stard, grubbily ambitious MP and (anti-)hero of the sitcom *The New Statesman*. Cue musical immortality for *Pictures* – although in truth, Mussorgsky's grand, evocative suite deserves to be loved entirely on its own terms.

Rachmaninov Piano Concerto No. 2

Once upon a time, concertos conventionally used to begin with an orchestral introduction followed by the soloist joining in some time later. Lovely, but a little restrictive, and the breaking of that convention in the Romantic era freed up composers to explore all manner of inventive ways to set things in motion. Here, that means a series of solo piano chords, each anchored to a bottom F but with their central notes shifting upwards and each getting a little louder than the last. Over eight chords, we move from *pianissimo* to *fortissimo*, and the first great concerto masterpiece of the 20th century is on its way…

Grieg Piano Concerto

The piano isn't the first instrument to be heard in Grieg's famous 1868 concerto – that

Heading out to sea: the start of which opera, pictured here, is described in Question No. 3?

Starters for ten

Can you name which pieces of music these highly distinctive opening bars come from?

1. A rising 'F, A flat, F' is the motif sounded out by wind and brass in this symphony's first three bars, spelling out in initials the composer's 'Frei aber froh' motto.

2. Accompanied by pizzicato violas and cellos, a *pianissimo* snare drum plays a two-bar, quavers-and-semi-quaver-triplets rhythm that will be repeated throughout the entire piece.

3. In just the third bar, cellos and wind instruments present a famous chord – F, B, D sharp and G sharp – whose feeling of being unresolved pervades the rest of the four-hour opera.

4. A very loud E flat pedal note and organ chord introduce the words 'Veni, veni, creator spiritus', sung with gusto by an equally vast chorus as this symphony bursts into life.

5. Played by just four cellos and two violas, the Russian hymn 'O Lord, Save Thy People' provides the solemn opening to an orchestral work that will end with a bang.

6. Achoo! A big, upwardly rising orchestral 'sneeze' sets this opera in motion – a traditional sign in folklore, explained its composer, of the truth of a tale that is about to be told. Today, the orchestral suite of the same name is heard more often than the opera.

7. A sharp crack of the whip snaps everyone to attention in this lively concerto, spurring the piano soloist, strings, percussion and piccolo into instant action.

8. As the pianist's right hand tries to charm us with a lilting melody that is typical of its composer, the left hand insistently tap, tap, taps out an A flat. Tap, tap, tap… And are those storm clouds we can see gathering?

A sharp crack of the whips snaps everyone to attention in this concerto

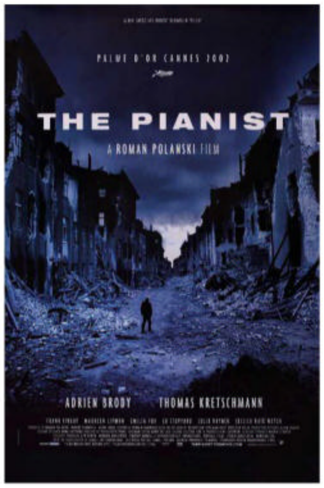
9. If an A natural is worth hearing once, it's worth hearing twice. Or, in this instance, 26 times in a row, as is played in unison by the strings and brass in the first 14 bars of this boisterous symphony.

10. The first instrument we hear in this darkly disturbing opera is the xylophone, whose rapidly repeated B natural quavers tell us we can hear a water mill turning nearby.

See p42 for answers

Dance to the death: Stravinsky's shattering *The Rite of Spring*, Avignon, France, 2005

Horror moment: (above) Herbert Lom plays Bach's Toccata in *The Phantom of the Opera*, 1962; (below left) *The Pianist* featured Beethoven's 'Moonlight' Sonata



Quiz answers *from p.41*

1. Brahms's Symphony No. 3
2. Ravel's *Boléro*
3. Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*
4. Mahler's Symphony No. 8
5. Tchaikovsky's *1812* Overture
6. Kodály's *Háry János*
7. Ravel's Piano Concerto in G
8. Chopin's 'Raindrop' Prelude
9. Nielsen's Symphony No. 3
10. Janáček's *Jenůfa* (title role, above, played by Maria Jeritza)

GETTY

honour falls to the timpanist, who opens with a brief rumble before the soloist, accompanied by a single note from the rest of the orchestra, crashes in with a big A minor chord and subsequent cascade down the keyboard. In live performance, this opening can prove something of a spectator sport – as the conductor raises the baton, most pianists sensibly have their hands poised in advance above the right notes, but a daring few lift them only at the last moment, adding a certain frisson of excitement that they might miss their target. They never do, of course.

Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto No. 1

The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra chose wisely in selecting the opening of Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto to begin *Hooked On Classics*, 1981's improbably successful mash-up of classical staples and disco beats. As a statement of intent, it's hard to beat the start of this great concerto: the French horn's descending four-note motif is an urgent call to arms, further fuelled by a striking chord from the strings. Seconds later, the piano enters with a series of massive, rolling chords. The mood is heroic, monumental: Russian Romanticism at its most grandly expressive. Strong choice, Royal Phil.

Stravinsky The Rite of Spring

How can something composed more than a century ago still manage to sound so unsettling every single time? Even if one didn't know the violence of the music that lies ahead or was entirely unaware of the gruesome scenario that is set to be played out over the course of this groundbreaking 1913 ballet – a sacrificial victim dancing herself to death – that high, uncomfortably exposed bassoon solo would still be guaranteed to send a shiver down the spine. It is unerringly creepy, but therein lay the genius of the young Stravinsky.

JS Bach Toccata and Fugue in D minor

Now onto the most instantly recognised work in the whole of the organ repertoire. Or, more to the point, the most instantly recognised first few bars. By the time Walt Disney chose Bach's dramatic opener for use in his *Fantasia* in 1940, it had already made appearances in various horror movies, and has remained the default go-to for depicting all things dark and Gothic ever since. Above all, it's that first big chord rising from a bottom D in the pedals that conjures up images of danger lurking in the shadows and coffin lids opening. The Toccata is, in fact, fairly easy to play – so, simply find a big instrument, and you too can scare the bejeezus out of everyone.

Beethoven 'Moonlight' Sonata

Haunting and introspective, the *Adagio sostenuto* opening of Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 14, 'Moonlight' uses a hypnotic triplet rhythm in the right hand to introduce a shadowy, dreamlike atmosphere. Then comes a solemn, chorale-like melody, full of quiet melancholy. The dynamic remains hushed throughout, as if the music is meant to be heard in solitude, and the movement's uniquely confiding atmosphere has made it a favourite whenever a sense of probing introspection is required. Films including *The Pianist*, *Misery* and *Interview with the Vampire* have harnessed its quiet mystery, while The Beatles drew on those arpeggiated triplets for *Abbey Road*'s 'Because'.

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A new dawn

Aurora Orchestra has been pushing boundaries for 20 years, not least through its daring memorised performances, writes Rebecca Franks

‘I have this proudly on my wall,’ says conductor Nicholas Collon, showing me virtually, on Zoom, a stylish framed black-and-white photo. ‘It’s the end of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony, at the Proms.’ I nod. Makes sense. Who wouldn’t want to celebrate such a milestone moment. But it turns out there’s more to the image than first seems.

‘If you look closely,’ continues Collon, ‘you can see a lot of people laughing. That’s because, you know those endless C major chords, well I gave one in a rest. I don’t know why. And one cellist went like that [he mimes playing]. We got to the end two bars later and everyone’s laughing.’

That’s surely one of the secret ingredients that has propelled Aurora Orchestra from a postgraduate passion project to one of the UK’s most vibrant and creative ensembles. The orchestra that laughs together, stays together – as the saying doesn’t quite go. This year Aurora is celebrating 20 years of music-making, with its biggest international tour to date, a weekend of birthday concerts at Snape Maltings, a family orchestral theatre adventure inspired by Saint-Saëns’s *The Carnival of the Animals* and a summer of Shostakovich’s Fifth Symphony, including a debut at the Edinburgh International Festival.

Over the past two decades, Aurora has given concerts involving everyone from puppeteers to capoeira dancers, in venues from shopping centres to industrial electronic dance spaces. It’s performed eclectic programmes featuring Mahler and Muhly, Ligeti and Lennon/McCartney, drawing in influences from classical, jazz, pop and folk. But it’s also made its unique mark on the orchestral scene with daring performances of blockbuster orchestral works from memory. When it took on Stravinsky’s *The*

ANDY PARADISE, CHRIS CHRISTODOULOU, GIULIA SPADAFORA

A direct connection: (main pic) Aurora performs *The Rite of Spring* at the BBC Proms, 2023; (left) principal conductor Nicholas Collon; (bottom) performing Beethoven's Fifth to care home residents in Bristol Cathedral, 2023

Rite of Spring at the Proms in 2023, *The Times*'s Richard Morrison called it 'simply one of the boldest and most breathtaking achievements I have witnessed in the Albert Hall'.

So, bringing together first-rate players with an appetite for adrenalin thrills is another of Aurora's secrets for success. But perhaps what also marks out the orchestra, which meets for projects rather than being a full-time set-up, is its knack for constant evolution. Look back over its history and, while many of the same players have stuck around, its artistic interests and ambitions have shifted and grown.

> 'To create any path you have to deviate off it. I don't regret any of the things that didn't work'

It all began in late-2004 when four musical friends – Nicholas Collon, Robin Ticciati, Clemency Burton-Hill and Louis Watt – decided to form a chamber orchestra, bringing together players from Cambridge University and the Royal Academy of Music. Setting up an ad hoc group with your friends is a rite of passage for many an aspiring young conductor, but as Aurora's creative director and principal flautist Jane Mitchell recalls, 'There was an element of Robin's star already rising, and there was quite a starry feeling to the opening. It felt exciting.'

'The name Aurora hoped to signify some kind of "new dawn": a new ensemble coming into being,' explains Collon. 'Simultaneously [it makes a] nice allusion to the shifting colours and lights of the aurora borealis. I can't for the life of me remember exactly what conversation came up with the name, but I remember being unsure about it. In the end, I love it!' Aurora struck out with a 'quite uncompromising' debut programme of Schoenberg, Hindemith, Debussy and Wagner in 2005, conducted by Ticciati and Collon. But by 2007, Ticciati had been appointed music director of Glyndebourne on Tour. 'We had to make a decision whether to carry on or not,' remembers Mitchell. Aurora was born again. 'The way in which we carried on was very different. It immediately felt much lower key but that's what we needed in order to become what we are now. There were more voices, and it was a genuine kitchen-table thing. The players took on roles like librarian and fixer. We had ideas about collaboration.'

In this incarnation, the orchestra was a crucible of experimentation and invention. 'We found our way through doing,' says Mitchell. The group were awarded a residency at the Royal Academy of Music and they embraced cross-arts collaboration. 'We did puppet theatre; we did something with cartoon music and live animation,' remembers Collon, who by then was Aurora's principal conductor, a role he's made very much his own. 'We did Birtwistle's *Secret Theatre*, sort of staged, all on a shoestring, incredibly difficult, very ambitious, by the skin of our teeth and quite fun.' They worked with lighting designers and dancers, seeing what drew in audiences, and gradually built a reputation and relationships with the likes of LSO St Luke's, Kings Place and Snape Maltings. In 2010, it was named best ensemble at the Royal Philharmonic Society Awards; the following year Arts Council England awarded it funding for the first time.

There were misses as well as hits. I remind Collon of a theatrical horror-inspired concert involving hymn books and supernatural antics that I went to around 2011. I found it thoroughly baffling. '*Thriller* was a very out-there, wacky one,' agrees Collon. 'One of the critics absolutely hated it, but then another gave it a glowing review. When we were doing those things, we didn't necessarily think it was the best thing that has ever been done, but in order to create any path you have to deviate off it. You have to try things and decide, well, did that work? Did that not work? Of course there were collaborations that didn't work. I don't regret any of that actually.' Mitchell points out that 'collaboration is hard, and music takes a back seat quite happily. You have to find the right people who are up for really deep involvement in the music.'

When Aurora took the risky step of performing Mozart's Symphony No. 40

Music for young and old: (clockwise from right) an 'Immersed' event for school children, 2018; Hans Zender's *Winterreise* with tenor Allan Clayton, March 2024; an outdoor performance at Norfolk & Norwich Festival, 2016

entirely from memory at the Proms three years later, it quite easily could have been a miss. No one had ever attempted it in the history of the Proms. 'It was a total experiment,' explains Collon. Needing to find something to pair with Benedict Mason's ambitious commission *Meld*, whose fragments were also played from memory, he hit on the idea of a memorised symphony.

'Two weeks before, I heard a pianist playing a Mozart concerto beautifully but having a total car-crash memory slip in the cadenza. It sounded like Schoenberg,' says Collon. 'I basically had a panic attack. I thought, "This is going to be impossible". I stayed up all night and wrote these enormous lists to everybody of how to memorise their parts. I sent it to all the players. But not a single person read it. They all turned up, very nervous, but it was brilliant and exhilarating. It was obvious we wanted to do more.'

And more is exactly what they've done – over 100 memorised performances of 15 major works, reckons Collon. At first, some people called it a gimmick. Commentator Norman Lebrecht asked on his website *Slipped Disc*: 'Can you see the point? We can't…' But audiences and critics have been won over, while the players love the challenge. 'Each time I've come away from the memorised projects feeling closer to the music,' says Timothy Orpen, founder member of Aurora and principal clarinettist of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra. 'People are desperate to do these projects because of the experience and the connection you feel with your colleagues. It's a journey you are on together.'

Has he learnt any tricks for making memorising easier, I wonder. 'No. It still takes a long time if you want to be really well prepared,' he says. 'Memorising the clarinet part of Beethoven Nine is far more difficult than memorising, for example, the Mozart Clarinet Concerto. The Everest of orchestral memorisation is probably the viola part to Beethoven's "Pastoral", because there's a lot of F major and you're hovering around that middle C but with slightly varying rhythms, so there's very little melodic interest. It's a massive challenge.'

Aurora's feats of memory have become a Proms staple – as have the orchestra's guided explorations of the music, programmed in the first half. They blend words, music, acting, explanation, analysis, history and humour. (It's not irrelevant that Aurora's Proms debut was with a *Horrible Histories* family Prom.) 'We now call them "plays",' says Mitchell, who writes the scripts. 'David Pickard, when he was head of the Proms, was really interested in education

New kids on the block

Five other recent ensembles

Bold visions: Christopher Stark conducts The Multi-Story Orchestra at the Peckham Rye Car Park in 2014; (below) Chineke! founder and double bassist Chi-chi Nwanoku

The Paraorchestra

The brainchild of conductor Charles Hazlewood, the game-changing Paraorchestra was set up in 2011 and is dedicated to providing opportunities for disabled, deaf and neurodivergent musicians. This year, it won 'best ensemble' at the Royal Philharmonic Society Awards (see p32).

The Multi-Story Orchestra

When composer Kate Whitley and conductor Christopher Stark joined forces to put on Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* in a car park in Peckham in 2011, they didn't entirely know what to expect. The acoustics turned out to be good, the concert was a hit – and the Multi-Story Orchestra has been shaking up the traditional concert format ever since.

Chineke!

'Championing change and celebrating diversity in classical music,' is the motto of Chineke!, which was created by double bassist Chi-chi Nwanoku in 2015 as Europe's first majority-Black and ethnically diverse orchestra. Now resident at the Southbank Centre, Chineke! also fields a junior orchestra.

Manchester Collective

This bold group, founded by violinist Rakhi Singh in 2015, is always shifting shapes in its quest to 'create intimate and intense human experiences inspired by the music that we love, for everyone'. Sometimes, such as in 2021 when it made its Proms debut, it lands in the shape of a chamber orchestra.

Sinfonia of London

The name and heritage may date back decades, but it was only in 2018 that conductor John Wilson breathed new life into the dormant Sinfonia of London. Initially a recording orchestra, the group jumped into live performance in 2021 to five-star reviews, and has flourished since.

GETTY, NICK RUTTER, DIBS MCCALLUM, JULIAN GUIDERA

for adults. He paired us with [presenter] Tom Service, which was great. Then when we did Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*, the piece invites theatricality and fantasy, so we thought we'd take the opportunity to work with an actor, use Berlioz's text and break apart the score.'

Some of that theatrical spirit comes from Aurora's enterprising education work. The 'Far, Far Away' concert series for 0-5 year-olds features music and original stories from Aurora's writer-in-residence Kate Wakeling with titles like 'Tchaikovsky and the Magical Toy Box' and 'Mendelssohn and the Moving Machines'. The success of these concerts has led to Aurora Classroom for primary schools, a digital learning platform featuring films and lesson plans. Its latest instalment, 'Meet the Instruments', features 15 new songs and will be turned into a live show in September. 'We sat down [during the pandemic] and thought how do we reach more people? "Far, Far Away" is full of ideas about how to share music creatively,' says Mitchell. 'One of our creative team, Jessie Maryon Davies, is such an expert in how you use music and education, and with Kate, it felt like there's a world to give.'

> Each time I've come away from the memorised projects feeling closer to the music. Players love them because of the connections they forge

The desire to reach more people is also behind the Aurora Orchestra's recent foray into fully immersive performances, which led to them performing an 'exploded' version of Beethoven's Seventh in 2021 at Printworks, a former printing factory that became a leading electronic music venue, to an audience of 1,000, who could wander between the musicians. Last year, they upped the ante by playing Stravinsky to 2,000 listeners at Drumsheds. 'Five years ago, memorisation felt like the tip of the iceberg. Now these Drumsheds and Printworks concerts feel like that. I think there's a lot more to be done there,' says Mitchell. 'Apart from anything, those venues have the most insane production set-up. I think the theatrical storytelling in those spaces could be done really well.'

With 20 years of Aurora behind him, what does Collon hope the next 20 years bring? 'My personal ambition is to still be alive in 20 years! But that seems a bit negative, doesn't it. What we've learned is that we couldn't have predicted some of the ways Aurora has gone, so who knows. It may be that an idea takes us in a totally new direction. We're set up to be flexible. The stuff we've done recently at Printworks and Drumsheds has been really exciting, and there might be new ways of doing that in five years' time that we haven't thought of. Increasingly, we just do stuff that we think is going to be really good.' That's surely the real secret of Aurora Orchestra's success.

Aurora plays at Snape Maltings 10-11 May; Carnival tours 3-23 May; auroraorchestra.com

The art of memory

When performing by heart, how do musicians remember all those notes? Four top artists explain their recommended techniques

Ah, the magnificent soloist… Whether virtuoso violinists with flying fingers, dazzling pianists dashing off crashing chord clusters or stupendous sopranos defying the limits of the human vocal cords with thrillingly high coloratura, these superhuman musical performers never fail to entertain and enthral us with their moving interpretations.

But how often do we think about their feats of memorisation as we sit in our comfortable stalls seat, enjoying their performance without a musical score? When you consider the sheer number of notes in the average concerto or opera, the human capacity for recollection is nothing short of miraculous. As with all incredible achievements, however, behind the seemingly effortless performance are hours of practice, planning and thought – plus various techniques developed over the course of a long career.

So, as we celebrate the 20th anniversary of Aurora Orchestra on page 42 (a highly unusual ensemble performing collectively without the score), we've asked four top performers to share with us the one memorisation technique they couldn't live without… and in most cases, these turn out to be applicable to non-musical aspects of our lives as well. Read on for a peak into the life of the performing musician, and marvel at the wonders of the human brain!

Tasmin Little *Violinist*

Method: Imagine musical roundabouts

One of my favourite memorisation techniques is the 'musical roundabout'. Music is full of repeated patterns and similar phrases – and Mozart is a prime example. There's a lot of similar material in his works, but each time this material reappears it goes off in a different direction – to, say, the dominant key in the development, or back to the tonic in the recapitulation. His music is packed with these roundabouts – almost as many as Milton Keynes! – and you must take the correct exit or you'll end up in completely the wrong place.

ADI STOICOVICIU, GETTY

> Music is full of repeated patterns and similar phrases, and you have to take the right "exit" or you'll wind up in completely the wrong place

To get this right you can't simply rely on muscle memory – you must understand where you're going and why. All too often, students believe their physical training will kick in on stage when they need it most, but memorisation is about active thinking and using the brain.

Anyone who has ever encountered a roundabout while driving will know it's crucial to choose the correct exit – this involves mental preparation as you approach. In Mozart's rondos, so often the final movements of his violin concertos, ideas come back in minutely altered forms and at the roundabout one exit may require a completely different fingering or hand position to enable the player to take the correct exit. Otherwise, instead of heading gaily off to Edinburgh, we'll be on the way to Somerset!

The first step to identifying these perilous junctions is to study the music away from the instrument, and to take note of exactly where the points of difference occur. If you have an understanding of what is going on harmonically, underneath the solo part, that will enhance your ability to choose the correct exit. Which chords are taking us to different keys and which ones keep us where we are?

In the Elgar Violin Concerto, there is a passage in the first movement that reappears around eight times, at the bottom of an enormous scale. If you start in the wrong place, you don't have a hope of ending up in the right place at the top of the scale. Early in my career, I temporarily forgot my starting note, but because I knew where the piece was going harmonically, I knew I had to begin on the leading note to that key. There, my general musicianship and time with the score kicked in and saved me. If you've done your homework, your back-up system number two will kick in, and if that fails, there's always back-up number three!

Today I do a lot of public speaking, and although a lot of what I say will be improvised in the moment, I'll have my bullet points for each subject. These are in fact very similar to musical roundabouts, allowing me to take the correct road and to travel along that until I get to the next junction and embark on the next subject. So, my musical memorisation techniques have been invaluable in this next stage of my career.

Sarah Connolly *Mezzo-soprano*

Method: Build memorising into your everyday routine

My methods for memorising music include writing things down – I have several notebooks filled to the brim – plus recording and then listening to myself, and also thinking about it just before I go to bed. That last one can be a bit of a double-edged sword, as you can then not sleep very well. If it's an opera role, once I've worked out what I'm doing, I also tend to listen to a good recording of it.

For tricky lines that simply won't go in, I stick Post-it notes with them on surfaces all around the house: on doors, the fridge, mirrors, pictures, at the top of the landing; anywhere, in fact, except my bedroom. This method works so well, as you have to go past certain places whenever you want to get to a part of the house, so you see them every time. I remember when I was learning the part of Octavian in Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier*, a strange role compared to others in that it was very conversational. In this instance, I wrote short conversations down on the Post-its – not just my words but the other person's as well, as it was so important to be able to recognise everything that was being sung.

In general, learning things as I am doing jobs while moving around the house is a good method. And then, when I was laying a new garden, I used to learn verses of a song by taking the score outside, putting it on a bench and then seeing how much of it I could remember while I was digging or weeding – consequently, some of my scores have mud on them.

Making notes: Stephen Hough and conductor Marin Alsop in discussion before a concert in 2012; (below) Hough's own compositions

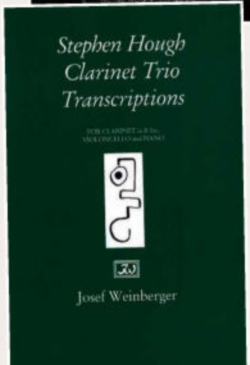
Keeping the score

Stephen Hough, Pianist

I play many things from memory, but never my own compositions! Unsurprisingly, a lot of people ask, 'If you wrote the piece, why do you need a score?' One reason is that when I'm performing my own music, I want to separate completely the person playing the work from the person who wrote it. I don't want it to seem like I'm walking out onto the stage and half-improvising it. My pieces are a bit like, say, a sculpture – I've put down the chisel and it's done. Now they're published, I can't change them even if I wanted to, and they're there for other people to play.

> **I don't want it to seem like I'm walking onto the stage and half-improvising**

MIRABILIS
THE MUSIC OF STEPHEN HOUGH



Also, both in my own music and in a lot of contemporary works, patterns change. You don't tend to get the patterns that you have with, say, Beethoven. He is one of the easiest composers to memorise, as is, surprisingly, Liszt – with both of those, things happen in a way that you can lock into. But with most music from about World War I onwards, the patterns are not so clear and it's easy to forget things. When playing from memory, I never want to feel that I'm counting things or thinking, 'Now this is an F and it happens twice' and so on, but unless you can really sense the flow of the music without thinking about what's coming next, then you're stuck with that. That said, a lot of younger pianists have played my music and memorised it!

The whole topic of performing from the score is one that has changed over the last 20 years or so. From about the 1880s up to the 1980s, it was absolutely forbidden to play from the score unless you were very elderly – as in the case of Myra Hess in her later years, for instance – or there were other such circumstances. Today, in contrast, a lot more performers are playing everything from iPads.

A night to remember: Amanda Roocroft as the Marschallin and Sarah Connolly as Octavian in Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier*; (below) Alisa Weilerstein

And when I go on a dog walk, I'll sometimes take with me a photo of lines I've learned and repeat them on the walk until that verse has gone in. Somehow, I walk in the rhythm of the song, so it is a very good way of helping it physically into my body. Amusingly, when I used to live near Stroud, there was a guy who lived at the bottom of the hill who said he would often hear me singing out full blast as I went up Selsley Common. As he was a real opera fan, he'd come over and meet me and ask what I was learning. It was very funny!

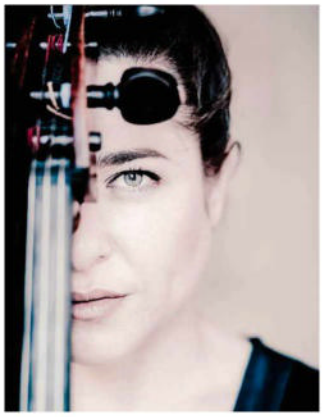
As a rule, the pieces that are the easiest to remember are those that I like singing – for instance, although it has a lot of technical difficulties, the part of Jocasta in Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex* was an absolute doddle to memorise as I love the music so much. Ditto Susie in Turnage's *The Silver Tassie*. If I like it, it goes in, as I have an actual wish to do the work.

Alisa Weilerstein *Cellist*

Method: Construct a mental maze

I usually do a lot of singing, taking the music away to make sure I can sing through a piece by memory and know it on a gut level, even before translating it into the fingers. So much of the memorising happens by osmosis.

There's certain new music which is quite difficult to memorise; rhythmically complex things that are harder to integrate. Then there are pieces that, let's say, are closer to my childhood training that I don't even have to think about memorising; they just come. Some music takes more effort to memorise.



GETTY, MARCO BORGGREVE

> 'There's certain new music which is quite difficult to memorise: rhythmically complex things are harder to integrate'

So I begin with singing, but then I also play mapping games in my mind. I look at the music as a maze, so if you take a wrong turn, you end up stuck and you have to think about how in the world you are going to get out! For example, if I'm memorising Bach, where there are so many sequences that repeat, but in different ways (which is quite confusing for the memory), I quiz myself: 'What if the music actually went in this direction, how would you get out of it?' Or 'What if it went this way?' You can really memorise all the patterns in that way, so that when similar patterns – but crucially not the same patterns – come back, you know how to handle them.

One piece specifically that I found I had to play more of such memory games with was Shostakovich's Second Cello Concerto. This includes patterns which are similar but not the same, and the variation is always just slightly different! There are several of those instances, so it's a big challenge to get them all in the right order, and to recognise rhythmical patterns that are ever so slightly different to what has come before. There are a lot of puzzle pieces that go

NICK RUTTER

Vivid visualisations: (left) pianist Alexandra Dariescu creates mental representations of music on the page that she can access at any time and in any place

together but not in the same way. That's the most challenging thing to memorise, because it's so easy to take a wrong turn somewhere and then you wind up in oblivion – which is never good.

Something I also find very helpful as a string player is learning with the left hand alone, without the bow, and going through the music with the score and then without the score several times until my left hand really knows what to do on its own. You can absolutely do that without the cello – that's what I use plane rides for (when I'm not with the kids).

Alexandra Dariescu *Pianist*

Method: Visualise the score in your mind

Memorising music is such a fascinating and personal process. It's about both understanding the architecture of the piece and finding those methods that resonate with you personally – so that you can truly internalise the work's sound, emotion and structure.

There's a lot of patience and discipline involved as well. If I am setting out to get to know a new piece, I'll often wake up at 4am as that's when my brain is quiet – no phone calls, no emails – and I can assimilate as much of the music as possible.

> 'I'll often wake up at 4am as that's when my brain is quiet – no phone calls, no emails – and I can assimilate as much music as possible'

For the part of memorising that is muscle memory, the key is simply repetition – play the piece again and again, until it is 'under your fingers'. Repetition is key, but not enough on its own: you have to couple it with conscious listening, as muscle memory on its own can be dangerous to rely on. It's fine in a safe environment – by yourself in the practice room, say – but you can't rely on it under pressure.

But when it comes to a 'mental map' of the piece, I have a few techniques. Visualisation is the most important of these. It's a really cool process, yet until I came to university, I had never heard of it. I try to see the score in my mind, and I imagine my hands playing the piece. In this way, your mental practice often happens away from the instrument. And it comes in very handy – especially at moments of pressure.

I take the score away, to a quiet place somewhere. And I create a mental map of it, that I can access at any time. This is particularly useful on the road, where you don't have access to a piano. Waiting for a bus, holding my luggage, I will notice my fingers moving through the piece. It's an incredible process.

This mental map is, essentially, the music on the page. I can see the music and I know where I am at any point. And I will say those notes as I run through the piece in my mind. In rehearsals I can sing the piece: that's obviously not an option in concert, so I mumble it instead. People have asked me, 'Are you talking to yourself when you perform?' But no, I am just saying the notes to myself – because this helps me to focus in the moment. You have to be 100 per cent in that moment, and really see the score in your mind.

That's general visualisation: but there are some specific visualising techniques, too. For example, I'll break a piece down into its harmonic and formal structure. When you know the architecture of the piece – whether it's a sonata or variations, a concerto or a rondo – you'll always understand where you are going. Key relationships, harmonic progressions – it's like a road map through the piece.

Then I separate the different elements – melody, harmony, rhythm, voicing – and before I put them all together again I will often memorise each hand separately, and focus on each voice and how it interacts with the others. You need to understand how each part is working before you can put it all together.

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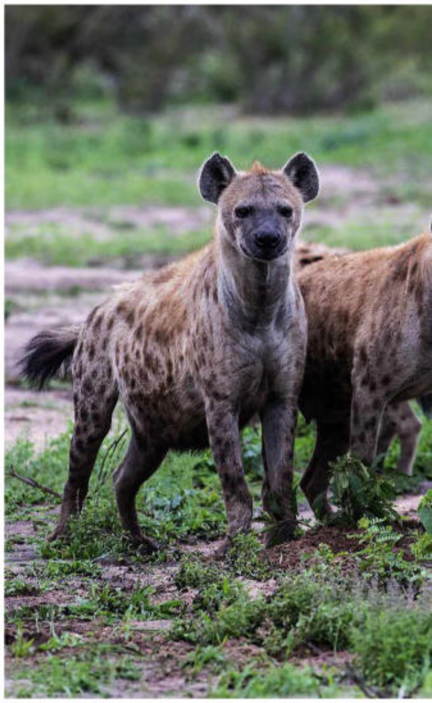
Call of the wild

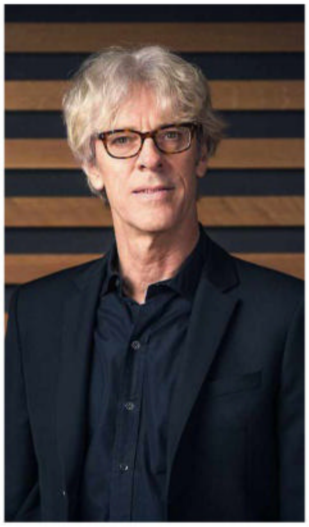
In his new concerto, former Police drummer Stewart Copeland teams up with field recordist Martyn Stewart to showcase the hoots, tweets, howls and growls of the animal kingdom, as he tells Claire Jackson

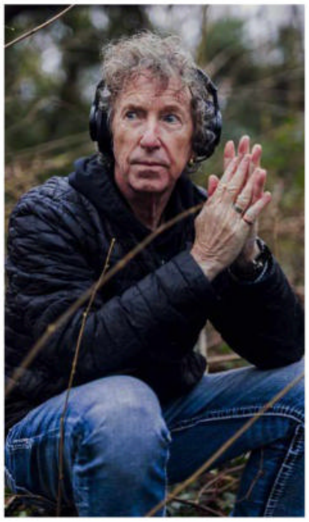
The violinist flaps about in his seat on stage at Lucerne’s KKL, playing an agitated phrase that quickly collapses into a *glissando*. The Swiss concert hall has just hosted Beatrice Rana, Yunchan Lim, Evgeny Kissin and the grand dame of piano, Martha Argerich, as part of the annual Le Piano Symphonique. Performances are serious affairs in this series: Mendelssohn’s First Piano Concerto is about as light-hearted as the repertoire gets. So, it’s rather disarming to see two members of the Lucerne Symphony Orchestra string section acting like broody hens, as though hypnotised by Paul McKenna. Finally, the violinist stands up, revealing the egg he has ‘laid’. Only one piece of music could incite such eccentric, po-faced behaviour – ‘Hens and Roosters’ from Saint-Saëns’s *Carnival of the Animals*, the iconic suite that evokes kangaroos, tortoises and a cuckoo, among others. Like the equally famous *Peter and the Wolf* by Prokofiev, *Carnival* musically recreates humans alongside feathery and furry friends: Saint-Saëns’s pianists play an imagined version of themselves – performatively lumpy scales and clunky chords, no doubt familiar sounds to the audience.

From the flute melodies that recreate the eponymous bird in Britten’s *Curlew River* to record-breaker favourite *Flight of the Bumblebee* by Rimsky-Korsakov, the birds and the bees have always found instrumental representation. In song, too, humans have reprised animal sound; from duetting cats (Rossini’s *Duetto buffo di due gatti*) to a woodland community (Janáček’s *The Cunning Little Vixen*). Next came the human-animal ensembles, notably the 1924 duet between cellist Beatrice Harrison and a nightingale in the musician’s Oxted garden, which was broadcast live on BBC radio and became a best-selling gramophone recording. As technology developed, so too has the musical interplay: Harvey’s wittily titled *Bird Concerto with Pianosong* includes slowed-down recordings of indigo bunting, orchard oriole, golden-crowned sparrow and others, interleaved with piano. *Wild Concerto*, the latest addition to



GETTY, SHAYNE GRAY





In the wilderness: (main pic) *Wild Concerto* follows the migration of the Arctic tern; (left) composer Stewart Copeland and sound recordist Martyn Stewart; (right) titi monkeys and (below) hyenas feature in the work

this menagerie, takes a similar view, this time positioning creatures from across the world within the traditional orchestral framework. Stewart Copeland – former drummer of The Police – has integrated natural soundscapes and animal vocalisations with instrumental timbres to create a distinctive 12-movement concertante work where nature is the soloist.

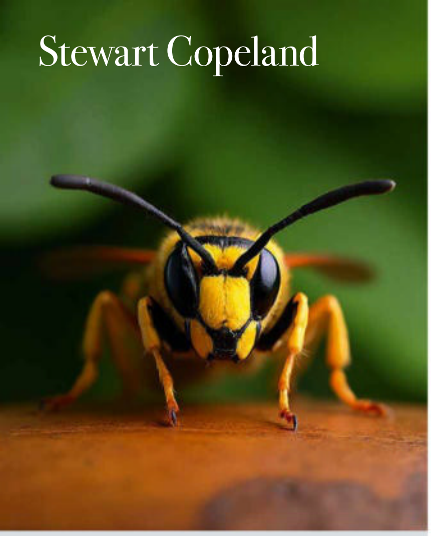
Wild Concerto spotlights field recordings by Martyn Stewart, the Birmingham-born Florida-based recordist who has been collecting sound since capturing blackbird song on a reel-to-reel tape machine. Fifty years on, Stewart's library covers 60 countries and features 3,500 species of bird. (These, and a vibrating Borneo jungle, chattering Punta Tombo penguins and crashing waves from 50 different coastlines can be heard at thelisteningplanet.com, with many of the 97,000 sounds curated into albums). As he listened to the recordings, Copeland – who has composed dozens of film scores, video game soundtracks and several stage works, including *Electric Saint*, a bio-opera about Nikola Tesla – was struck by the similarity they had with human instruments. 'They all have their own individual, often atonal melodies, but when you put a flute against a red-breasted nuthatch, for example, the synergy is amazing,' says the composer-percussionist. 'I picked out sounds that I felt were the soloists, like the wolves, and others that were more atmospheric, like the wild winds of Antarctica, and treated them in a similar way to a trombone or a guitar.'

> 'When you play a flute alongside the red-breasted nuthatch the synergy is amazing'

A kookaburra laughs at the Kingdom Orchestra strings; an icy blast chills the percussion. It's fun to imagine a guillemot swooping across Abbey Road Studios, where *Wild Concerto* was recorded, or to visualise a frog seated among the ensemble, duetting with the saxophonist. The movements loosely trace an Arctic tern's migration from pole to pole, considering the creatures it might encounter as it flies from its Arctic breeding grounds (white-throated sparrows) over the Galapagos (blue-footed boobies) to Antarctica where it enjoys the Antarctic summer, meeting penguins then returning via the African coast. 'In its lifetime, the Arctic tern flies a distance equivalent to travelling to the moon and back – twice,' explains Stewart. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given his experience as a percussionist, there is a driving propulsion to *Wild Concerto*. The drums are played by Copeland ('he's jamming with a black-footed albatross,' laughs Stewart), and rhythm is on an equal footing to melody.

A word about those melodies – *The Lark Ascending* this is not. It's fair to say that titi monkeys do not have a traditionally beautiful language; movements like 'Hyena Party On the Skeleton Coast' and 'Screaming Piha (Trolls the Titi Monkeys of the Andes Basin)' are unlike the typical 'rainforest murmurs' you might encounter at a beauty salon or meditation class. And harvesting such interesting sounds wasn't exactly plain sailing either. Stewart tells me a particularly fascinating anecdote about recording nighttime wildlife on the Masumu River in Zimbabwe. 'I was checking to see what was around with a thermal imaging camera. I could see hippos and storks – and then a crocodile appeared from nowhere! I ran back, and as the crocodile slid back into the water, it dragged a load of cables and equipment with it. Of course, then I was reminded that crocodiles are cold-blooded – and therefore do not show up on a thermal camera...' The incident did not dampen Stewart's enthusiasm; elsewhere in his catalogue are whining wolves. 'I was in Denali National Park [in Alaska],' he says, 'I set up camp and ran a 100-foot cable from my tent, near to a moose carcass. The wolf pack soon arrived and squabbled over the food – it was incredible.'

Experiences like Stewart's are increasingly special as habitat degradation and the climate crisis impact the natural world. As a young naturalist, Stewart recorded many species in the suburban Midlands that are now under threat. The turtle dove, for instance, is on the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds' red list (a status that indicates crisis). 'There are probably five species I've recorded that don't exist on ►



Sting in the tail: amplified wasps

When animals sing

Can nature be musical?

Some musicians' backstage riders are notorious – Pavarotti liked fresh pasta to be made available; Madonna has reportedly insisted on new toilet seats to be installed in her dressing room – but for performances of *Nunu* (2003), the star performers need a fruit basket. Mira Calix's (above) quirky piece is scored for cicadas, crickets and/or wasps, whose sounds are amplified and mixed with electronics and more traditional instruments.

The insectile crackle is appealing for its own musical merit, a phenomenon that is a burgeoning area of research. 'Zoomusicology' – a term coined in 1983 by French composer François-Bernard Mâche – focuses on the musical aspects of animal sounds and questions the idea that only humans can be inherently musical.

For example, while some birdsong is 'useful' – consider a robin singing to mark his territory – there are plentiful examples of birdsong for its own sake. Similarly, humans use music for functional (work songs like sea shanties), social (community projects) and therapeutic (cognitive development) means – as well as creating fascinating sounds, just because.

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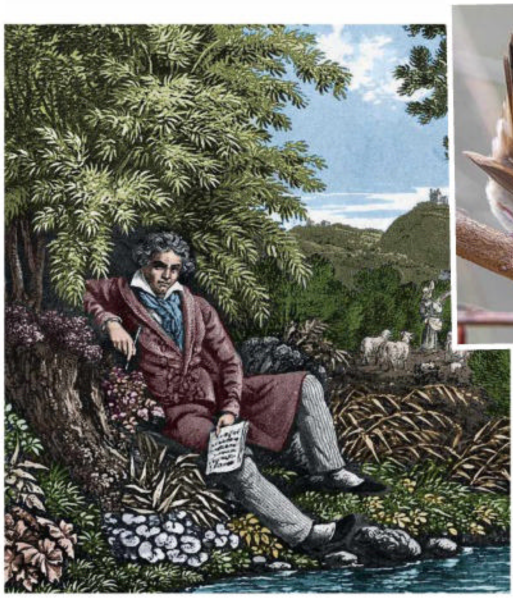


Natural inspiration: Beethoven pictured in a rural setting and a Cetti's warbler, inspiration for the fourth movement of the composer's Second Symphony

the planet anymore. And that's a huge sadness,' says Stewart. 'Years ago, I could record for an hour with minimum interference from planes, leaf blowers, cars. Now it takes hundreds of hours to get the same undisturbed natural sounds.'

Wild Concerto is therefore an important snapshot of nature in the 21st century. Its educational purpose follows on from Debbie Wiseman's *Carnival of the Endangered Animals*, intended as a companion piece to Saint-Saëns's 1886 suite, composed in 2020 for the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra. Wiseman's characterful music spotlights the red panda, Galapagos penguin, blue whale, black rhino, polar bear and orangutan, six species that are at immediate risk of extinction.

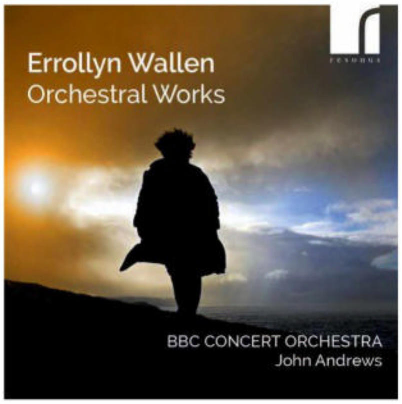
> The opening motif of Beethoven's Fifth is thought to be inspired by yellowhammer calls

These are warnings that we should heed; several avian stalwarts in music are dangerously close to disappearing. The cuckoo, heard in Mahler's First Symphony (first movement), the second movement of Beethoven's 'Pastoral' Symphony and Delius's tone poem *On Hearing the First Cuckoo in Spring* – as well as in compendiums by Respighi, Daquin and, of course, Saint-Saëns – is also on the 'red' list. As food sources are depleted across these birds' European migration path, the evocative sound of spring that has inspired composers through the centuries may well fall silent. Similarly, the nightingale has also been affected by habitat loss in the UK, with numbers significantly lower than in mainland Europe. It's difficult to imagine scrubland without their song; a florid melody that features alongside the cuckoo call in Handel's *The Cuckoo and the Nightingale* organ concerto and has been referenced by Liszt, Mendelssohn, Beethoven and many more composers, as well as poets like Keats. Today, there is an almost zero chance of hearing a nightingale sing in Berkeley Square.

Birds – particularly passerines (songbirds) – have influenced human music since the beginning. The Victorians encouraged the practice of caging wild specimens, prizing both their appearance and their call. Some, like the canary, have been bred based on their vocal ability and are beloved for their soft song. For others, like the ring-necked parakeet, their vocalisations contributed to the end of their domesticity: the rasping squawks (and concerns over parrot fever) are thought to be responsible for their release en masse in the early 20th century. Their subsequent takeover of London parks might suggest that the parakeet had the last laugh. But while their harsh cackles are an acquired taste, songs like that of the yellowhammer ('little bit of bread and no cheese') are universally welcomed. The opening motif in Beethoven's Fifth Symphony is thought to have originated from the yellowhammer calls the composer heard as he walked through Viennese parkland. In *Was Beethoven a Birdwatcher?*, David Turner attributes the first flourish in the fourth movement of his Second Symphony to the Cetti's warbler, a small bird with a powerful staccato call that has a similar rhythm to that immortal musical motif. The latest piece to take inspiration from ornithology is Arash Safaian's violin concerto *Birdsongs*, which uses transcriptions of bird calls gathered from all over the world. Safaian and Copeland will be on stage at Kings Place, London, to talk about these routes into music on Earth Day itself (22 April).

We can learn from musicians in the animal kingdom – especially when we examine human behaviour in the context of their presence. Often, the experience of those creatures, like the red cockatoo from Britten's setting of a text by Arthur Waley, reflect our own shortcomings. That bird is kept to mimic its keepers. Soon, it speaks 'with the speech of men', and when it is learned and eloquent 'they took a cage with stout bars / and shut it up inside'.

Stewart Copeland's Wild Concerto is released via Platoon on 22 April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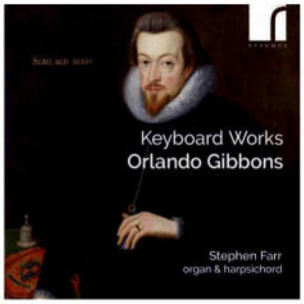
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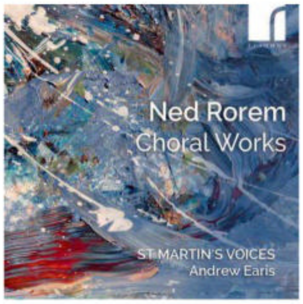
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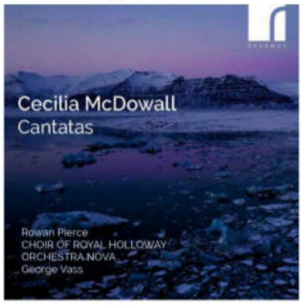
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Out of focus

We rarely admit it, but our minds often wander in classical concerts. Why are we so easily distracted, asks Ariane Todes, and how can we learn to engage?

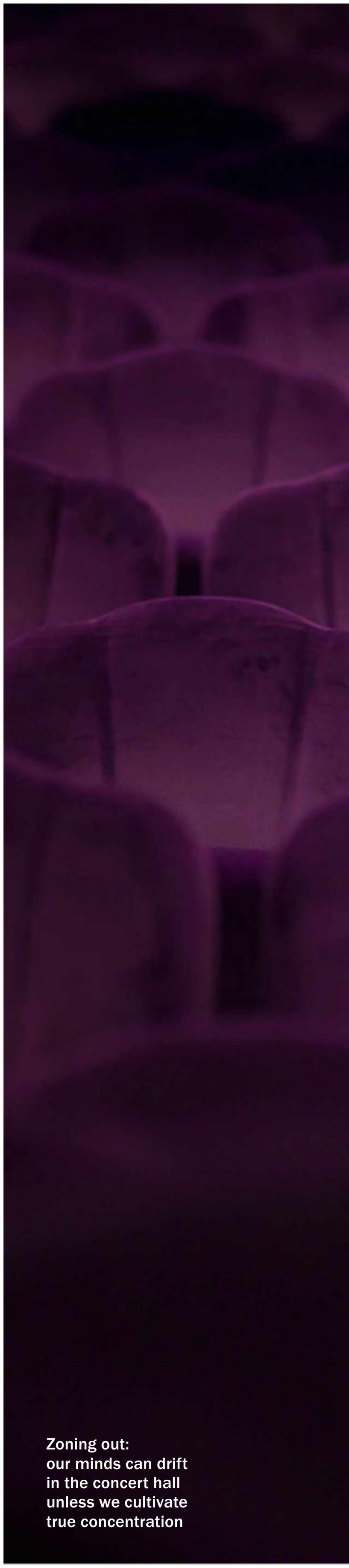
I have a confession. It's probably an inadvisable one for a classical music writer to make in these illustrious pages, but I'm going to make it anyway. Sometimes I go to classical concerts and, while the musicians are giving their all for the works of great creative masters, my mind drifts. I think about what I'm going to eat later, or wrestle with something said to me earlier in the day. Sometimes I barely notice the music at all. It may happen in music I don't know at all. It may happen in music I know very well. It may just happen. In these moments, I might even admit that what I was experiencing was boredom.

Now, this is a taboo subject in classical music. 'Boring' is so often the word used by people who haven't been brought up with classical music to explain why they won't listen to it, a way of dismissing it out of hand. Nothing boils my blood more quickly than hearing it from someone – particularly a celebrity – when asked about classical music, so I'm fully aware of the danger of the association. However, I've spent my entire life fully immersed in classical music, whether watching, listening or playing, and I still have these moments. So what is happening here?

Psychologists use a far more gentle term than 'boredom': 'mind-wandering'. Dr Diana Omigie is senior lecturer in psychology and director of Music, Mind and Brain at Goldsmiths, University of London. She offers me reassurance: 'We know that people cannot give sustained attention to any activity at full 100 per cent focus, even if that's their intention. Statistics suggest that between 40 and 50 per cent of the time we're actually mind wandering instead of doing the task we think we're doing. With classical music, people find themselves sitting in a concert hall, listening, for example, to three movements of between seven and ten minutes each, which is a long time to maintain sustained focus. Their minds wander and that's perfectly normal. It's our brain's way of taking stock.'

Psychologists can even track this mind-wandering, using electroencephalography. Attaching sensors to the listener's head, Omigie and her students are able to interpret the oscillations in the visual cortex, at the back of the head, correlating the activity to when the subject reports visual images. Mind-wandering in itself doesn't necessarily indicate boredom, though: 'Visual imagery can happen when you're disengaging, not because you're even bored. It just means that we naturally disengage from tasks. Visual imagery can also happen when you are listening attentively. Some people see the musical score, or they create contours. It doesn't have to mean you're disengaged. That makes it a complex thing to study.' So, does my imagination drift to fjords and swans because I'm bored or because I'm carried away by Sibelius?

> 'It's perfectly normal for our minds to wander. It's our brain's way of taking stock'



Zoning out: our minds can drift in the concert hall unless we cultivate true concentration

GETTY

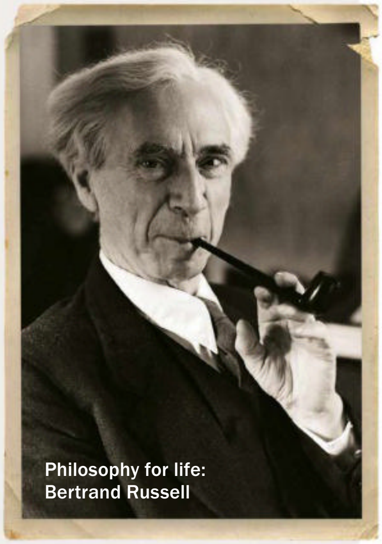
Counterbalancing mind-wandering, psychologists also study the concept of 'curiosity'. Omigie explains: 'In general, curiosity is the desire to know – an intrinsic motivation. Things that tend to drive curiosity are experiencing something surprising, something you didn't expect, something that changed. I look at music in terms of information theory – the idea that music is just one source of information. We can use models to look at how surprising music feels to a listener at a given moment, how information-rich it is, how much entropy and complexity there are, how uncertain they should be about what will happen next. The implication is that if you want to know something, you'll attend to the source of insights or information that will help you gain that knowledge.'

For critic Fiona Maddocks, founding editor of *BBC Music Magazine*, curiosity is an essential state of mind: 'You can be bored by anything if you don't sit up and try to think: "What's this composer doing? Where is this music going? Is it surprising me? Is it delighting me? Does it have a tune? Does it not have a tune? Is the percussion doing something amazing?" All these little questions are like following where a ball goes on a football pitch. This is how you find a way.'

It doesn't necessarily come naturally, though, she says: 'It took me a long time to know how to listen. It's about being active and really trying to engage. The more I've learnt how to listen, the further boredom is from my mind.' Although even she has her off days, she admits: 'If I go to something and I'm not on duty reviewing, my mind might slide because it feels like a night off. That's the moment when I'm not listening properly, forgetting how to get the most out of the music. I might be very tired and think about my shopping list, which I have trained myself not to do if I'm writing.'

So, this professional level of engagement requires practice: 'The realisation that every single note in a big symphony is interesting, for example, took a long time, because it's like a muscle that you have to exercise. It's not instant, unless you're immediately taken with a piece of music. You have to work at it – like weightlifting.'

Psychologists also study the importance of this background work. Omigie recounts a recent study (as yet not published or peer-reviewed): 'We showed that people with more musical training were less likely to be mind-wandering. The music was simple, but sometimes relatively complex – not quite atonal, but a bit unpredictable. People who have had more musical training are more likely to engage,



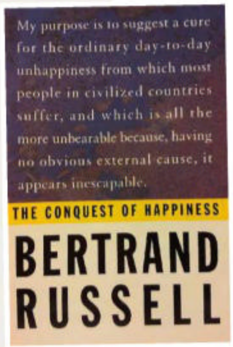
Philosophy for life: Bertrand Russell

It's good to be bored...

Bertrand Russell on the key to happiness

'A novel which sparkles from the first page to the last is pretty sure not to be a great book. Nor have the lives of great men been exciting except at a few great moments... Altogether it will be found that a quiet life is characteristic of great men, and that their pleasures have not been of the sort that would look exciting to the outward eye...

'The capacity to endure a more or less monotonous life is one which should be acquired in childhood. Modern parents are greatly to blame in this respect; they provide their children with far too many passive amusements, such as shows and good things to eat, and they do not realise the importance to a child of having one day like another, except, of course, for somewhat rare occasions... A generation that cannot endure boredom will be a generation of little men, of men unduly divorced from the slow processes of nature, of men in whom every vital impulse slowly withers, as though they were cut flowers in a vase.'



My purpose is to suggest a cure for the ordinary day-to-day unhappiness from which most people in civilized countries suffer, and which is all the more unbearable because, having no obvious external cause, it appears inescapable.

THE CONQUEST OF HAPPINESS

BERTRAND RUSSELL

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Concert concentration: (main) beware the distraction of the mobile phone; (left) Fiona Maddocks; (bottom) Bertrand Russell's *The Conquest of Happiness*

compared with those who didn't have that training. They're more likely to try to understand what's going on in the music and have ways of making sense of it. We also showed that in moments that were more unpredictable, most listeners will disengage, because the curiosity model is that if something is very unpredictable, and you don't think that there's anything to be learnt or understood, you'll disengage. We showed that experts were less likely to disengage at that moment, maybe because they were more able to manage that complexity.'

> In our constantly connected world, we're more bored than we used to be

Is there anything wrong with boredom, though? Philosophers have grappled with the question. Bertrand Russell saw boredom in evolutionary terms, as the opposite of primitive man's excitement at hunting and gathering, devoting a whole chapter to the subject in *The Conquest of Happiness*, and writing, 'The opposite of boredom, in a word, is not pleasure, but excitement.' He argues for a balance between the two: 'There is an element of boredom which is inseparable from the avoidance of too much excitement, and too much excitement not only undermines the health, but dulls the palate for every kind of pleasure... Too little may produce morbid cravings, too much will produce exhaustion. A certain power of enduring boredom is therefore essential to a happy life, and is one of the things that ought to be taught to the young. All great books contain boring portions, and all great lives have contained uninteresting stretches.' He may be talking in general terms, but surely it applies to a concert too. Could one really sit through a three-hour concert in a constant state of engagement and thrill? And not just classical music: which of us watches a film or binge-watches a series without moments and sometimes whole stretches of ennui?

It's a paradox that in our constantly connected, find-any-piece-of-music-in-seconds world, various studies conclude that we are actually more bored than we used to be. According to a study last year in *Communications Psychology,* 'Digital media makes people more bored through dividing attention, elevating desired level of engagement, diminishing sense of meaning, raising opportunity costs, as well as serving as an ineffective boredom coping strategy.' And yes, I have to admit that sometimes during concerts, my mind is wandering to what I'm going to post about the concert on Instagram, rather than actually attending to the concert.

For Maddocks, the live concert experience is a perfect antidote to all this. 'We are all losing concentration in the immediate, digital world,' she explains. 'The magnificent thing about being in a concert hall is that all you are there to do is to listen, which is almost never the case in the rest of our lives. In a concert hall, if your mind wanders for a moment, you can watch what the oboe or percussionist is doing, for example. And if they're not doing something now, they will be soon. Each aspect is a way of helping you to listen. It's like reading. You can get something out of great writing by skimming it, but if you savour every word in the way the writer wanted you to, you'll get something each time you go back to it.'

The worst outcome is for anyone to be put off going to concerts because they feel bad about their mind-wandering, or see it as anything other than natural. Maybe we shouldn't overthink it. 'In the end, music isn't an intellectual pursuit,' says Maddocks. 'It's a physical response to sound, and sometimes something extra, where your whole body almost quivers at the brilliance of a performance. That's the most you can expect, but a very good performance is just as enjoyable in different ways. You might get to know a piece better or hear musicians you hadn't heard before. Even if you're coming from a slightly cooler standpoint, you can still get a huge amount of enjoyment.'

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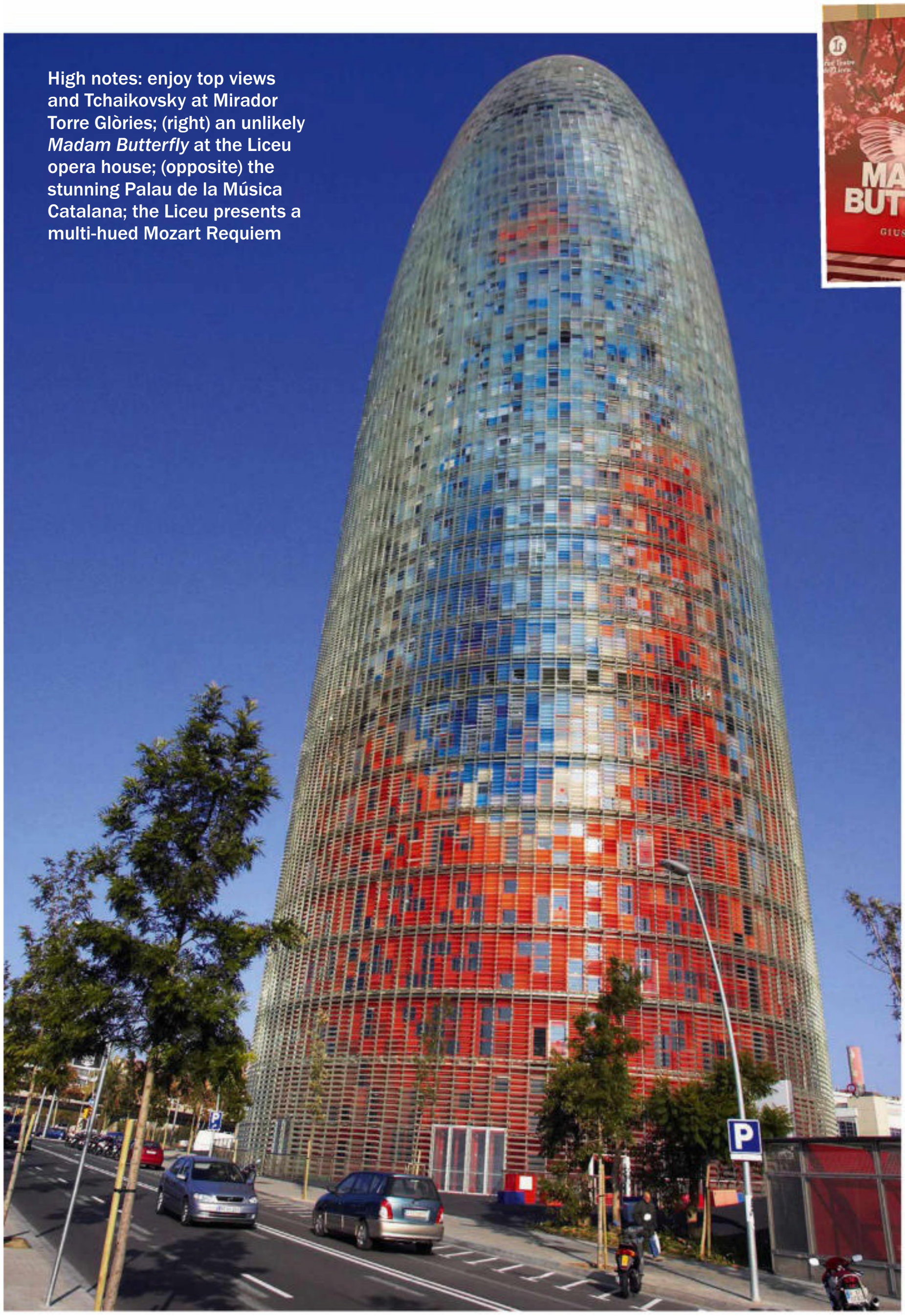
MUSICAL DESTINATIONS

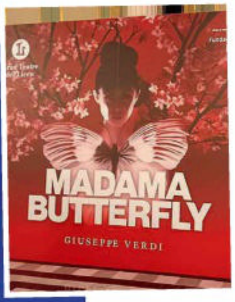
Barcelona Spain

Jeremy Pound heads up, down and all around as he investigates the vibrant classical music scene in this uniquely colourful Catalonian city



High notes: enjoy top views and Tchaikovsky at Mirador Torre Glòries; (right) an unlikely *Madam Butterfly* at the Liceu opera house; (opposite) the stunning Palau de la Música Catalana; the Liceu presents a multi-hued Mozart Requiem

SALIH ÜSTÜNDAĞ, MÜHENNA KAHVECI, GETTY

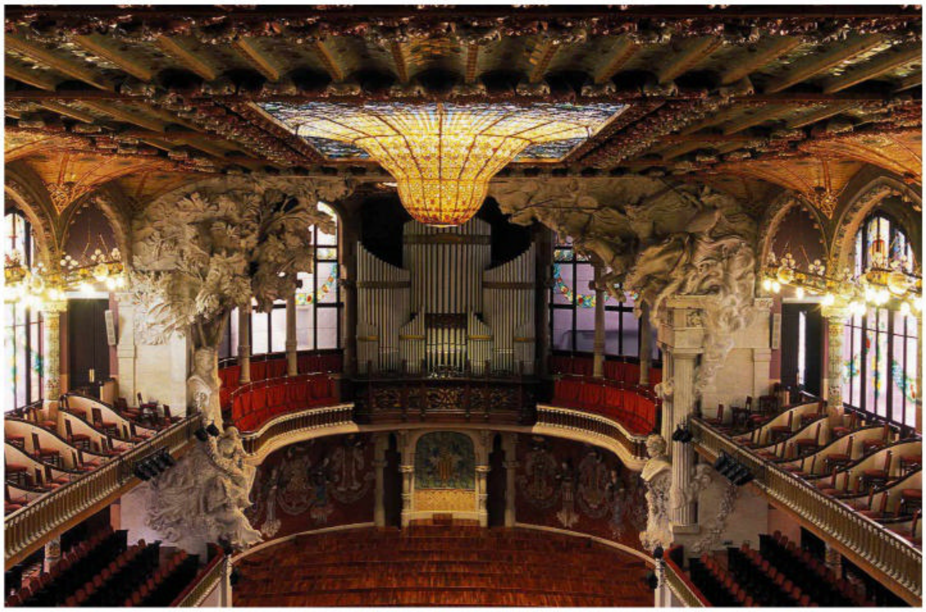


Shortly before Christmas, my resident contact in Barcelona sent me an exciting photo: proudly displayed outside the Liceu opera house on the city's famous Ramblas were posters advertising a new production of Verdi's *Madam Butterfly*. Really? Blimey. This was big, big news. Time to find out more.

Alas... false dawn. The *Madam Butterfly* in question was in fact the famous one by Puccini. My report on a newly discovered Verdi opera would have to wait – someone in the Liceu poster department had simply had a bad day at the office. Tsk.

But let's be fair. Highlighting that howler is a little mean, as the classical music scene in Barcelona is really rather classy, as even a brief visit will reveal. A couple of months later, in fact, I'm at the Liceu myself. On stage is a choreographed performance of Mozart's Requiem, in which the soloists plus Liceu Opera Choir portray themes of extinction and regeneration through actions that include a representation of the Catalonian sardana dance. It's unorthodox but effective, and is given a warm reception by the full house of nearly 2,300 – one of the largest in Europe and with five tiers of boxes, the 1847 auditorium is itself an impressive sight.

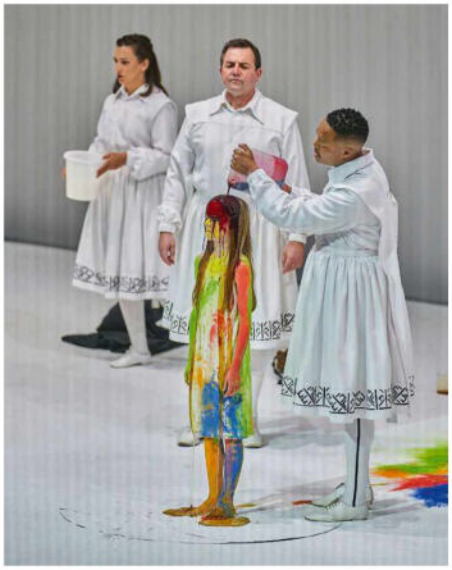
But even more visually arresting, I'd venture, is the Palau de la Música Catalana, around which I take a tour the following morning. Adorned on the outside by the busts of Wagner, Beethoven, Bach and Palestrina, within lies a riot of colourful, often quirky design, from the tessellated columns on the balcony to the figures of 18 muses around the stage – carefully positioned so that no audience



Musical scales

Gaudí's Casa Batlló

No feature on Barcelona should ever fail to mention Antoni Gaudí (1852-1926). As well as the Sagrada Familia church, the Catalan architect's legacy to the city includes the Parc Güell complex of gardens and buildings, the Casa Milà and the Casa Batlló (above). Complete with dragon-scaled roof and mosaic-decorated walls, the last of these, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, is one of the venues that will be hosting a free concert during Ciutat de Clàssica. Since 2021, its distinctively curved features have also been accompanied by a series of orchestral soundscapes written by British composer Dani Howard, based on the letters of the name 'Gaudí'.



Ciutat de Clàssica features free concerts in iconic buildings right across the city

member can see all 18 at once – and, most eye-catching of all, the stained-glass skylight above the auditorium. This magnificent building is the work of architect Lluís Domènech i Montaner, who was commissioned for it in 1904 by the Orfeó Català choral society, the first ever mixed-gender choir in Spain. Clearly, the Orfeó had a big following, as the Palau seats a remarkable 2,200 people. It feels a lot more intimate than that, however, and is a favourite venue for chamber music.

Along with the Auditori – a complex of state-of-the-art concert halls in the Sant Martí district that includes the 2,200-seat Sala 1 Pau Casals – the Liceu and Palau de la Música Catalana form the driving force behind Barcelona Obertura, a year-long celebration of classical music whose events range from solo recitals to July's Clàssica a la Platja, a huge free concert on the beach given by the Liceu Opera Orchestra, Barcelona Symphony Orchestra and the choirs of the Palau against a backdrop of the Mediterranean. The Obertura's musical offerings are spread right across a 12-month period, but its beating heart, if you like, can be found in its Ciutat de Clàssica spring festival, which runs from late-March to mid-April.

Now in its sixth instalment, Ciutat de Clàssica is aimed at getting people out and about and enjoying classical music not just in Barcelona's three main venues but also in a series of free concerts in iconic buildings right across the city. So, for instance, art lovers may want to check out guitarist Emma Campàs at the Museu Picasso and pianist Llum Colomer at the Fundació Joan Miró, while beer enthusiasts may find the saxophone and string quartets recital at the Estrella Damm Old Brewery to their taste. Head underground, meanwhile, for violinist Andrea Santiago in the Refugi 307 air raid shelter or, in the other direction, up the 30 floors of the Mirador Torre Glòries for Schulhoff and Tchaikovsky string sextets.

Should you head to the Torre Glòries at any other time, you will be immersed in *Sirens*, an ingenious soundscape by composer Maria Arnal and record producer John Talabot that translates live data collected from across the city – wind speed, sea temperature, particulate levels and so on – into a continuous piece in which no two moments are ever the same. And as you listen, you will be able to look out over the 360 degree views afforded by this glass-fronted, 144m tall building.

Immediately to the west you'll see the multiple spires of Gaudí's famous, still unfinished Sagrada Familia church. To the south, a cable car carries visitors from the Barceloneta port area up to Montjuïc and the city's Olympic Stadium. And in the distance to the north west, the Montserrat mountain range is home to a Benedictine abbey with a world-renowned choir. I could go on. And, indeed, on. This really is quite the most spectacular city.

For more: barcelonaobertura.com

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Duke Ellington

Mervyn Cooke explores a groundbreaking composer and influential bandleader who took jazz into previously untrodden territory

ILLUSTRATION: MATT HERRING

Edward Kennedy 'Duke' Ellington was without doubt one of the most remarkable musicians of the 20th century. Universally regarded in the jazz world as one of the finest creative talents the music had ever seen, he also garnered considerable respect from classical musicians for his sophisticated compositions which, although obviously 'jazz' in their constant delight in rich, expressive timbres and a deep engagement with African-American music, were so impressive on a purely compositional level that they left both critics and musicians dumbfounded at the consistently high level of his artistry.

Critics and musicians were left dumbfounded at the consistently high level of his artistry

Ellington was notoriously ambivalent about the value of improvisation in jazz – not a view, perhaps, that would naturally endear him to jazz die-hards. When he visited the UK in 1958, and his band played in Leeds, his programme note declared: 'It is my firm belief that there has never been anybody who has blown even two bars worth listening to who didn't have some idea what he was going to play, before he started… Improvisation really consists of picking out a device here, and connecting it with a device there; changing the rhythm here, and pausing there…' That sounds very much like a composer talking.

Ellington started his career as a pianist specialising in the post-ragtime style known as 'stride' piano. His first band billed themselves as The Washingtonians, taking their name from Ellington's home city, Washington DC. Unlike many early jazz musicians, he came from a middle-class background: his father worked as a butler at the White House. Little could Ellington Senior have realised that, in 1969, President Nixon would present Duke with the Medal of Freedom at a gala event staged at the White House to celebrate his 70th birthday. On this momentous occasion, Nixon noted that, although many heads of state had received this kind of reception, 'never before has a Duke been toasted. So tonight I ask you all to rise and join me in raising our glasses to the greatest Duke of them all, Duke Ellington!'

The Washingtonians went to New York in 1924, but gained little attention. All this changed when Ellington hired two musicians from New Orleans, who brought a more bluesy and spontaneous feel to his music. They were Barney Bigard (clarinet) and Bubber Miley (trumpet). Miley in particular transformed the band's sound, with his 'growl' style of playing: an uncanny imitation of the human voice, created by simultaneously using two different kinds of trumpet mute while producing a guttural noise in the throat. At the same time, drummer Sonny Greer – using a huge array of exotic percussion instruments – helped expand what became known as a 'jungle' style of jazz.

The quasi-primitive idea of jungle jazz was, regrettably, inextricably linked to a racist view of African-Americans, but this style nevertheless became a staple feature of the Ellington band's tenure as house musicians at Harlem's famed Cotton

Ellington's style

Timbre In his essay on Ellington's music, Constant Lambert (left) commented on 'the amazingly skilful proportions in which [instrumental] colour is used'. Take the band's recording of 'Mood Indigo': at the start, two lead instruments are flipped from their normal positions, with muted trombone at the top and a velvety clarinet way beneath it.

Low reeds The most immediately recognisable aspect of Ellington's orchestration is, perhaps, his fondness for rich, low reed textures, with an emphasis on the baritone sax. But the latter, in the hands of Harry Carney, could also be wonderfully agile, as in the bubbling countermelody to the vocal line in 'It Don't Mean a Thing'.

Sound identities Ellington had an uncanny ability to hire musicians who had distinctive musical personalities, but whose playing could be blended into an alchemistic whole. His trombone section in the 1930s, for example, comprised Lawrence Brown, whose playing was likened to that of a lyrical cellist; 'Tricky Sam' Nanton, who sounded like a preacher; and Juan Tizol, who played valve trombone and co-wrote the sultry hit 'Caravan'.

Classical influences Although Ellington liked to give the impression that his music was created spontaneously and instinctively, he studied scores by modern composers, and was particularly absorbed by Delius.

GETTY

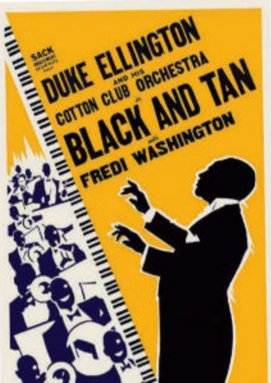
COTTON CLUB
COTTON CLUB
CARNEGIE HALL
A 8 AVE.
CHAMBERS ST
RCA VICTOR

Club (1927-31). The residency earned them considerable international attention, but the venue catered for an exclusively white audience (up to 700 of them), watching stage routines by black performers that portrayed stereotypically exotic scenarios. Creatively, however, the Cotton Club years allowed Ellington to compose music for dance routines that were very different from the demands of the commercial swing that came to dominate the popular music scene in the 1930s, an opportunity that helped him to develop as a composer. His most popular pieces to emerge were the band's signature tune, 'East St Louis Toodle-oo', 'Black and Tan Fantasy' (with a tag ending based on Chopin's funeral march, in honour of the New Orleans marching bands), and the vocalise 'Creole Love Call'.

Ellington and his band went on tour to Europe in 1933, where they caught the attention of the composer Constant Lambert. In the following year, Lambert included in his provocative book *Music Ho!*, the first serious essay devoted to Ellington's achievements. Comparing Ellington's music to what he felt was the repetitiveness of even the greatest jazz improvisers, Lambert declared: 'The best records of Duke Ellington ... can be listened to again and again because they are not just decorations of a familiar shape but a new arrangement of shapes.' He continued: 'The first American records of his music may be taken definitively, like a full score, and are the only jazz records worth studying for their form as well as their texture.' The reference to definitive versions of Ellington's music reflected Lambert's puzzlement that the bandleader constantly recomposed his pieces in sometimes markedly different guises. And, while Lambert was complimentary about Ellington's genius in writing three-minute miniatures that would fit onto one side of the 78rpm disc that was the industry standard at the time – 'Ellington's best works are written in what may be called ten-inch record form, and he is perhaps the only composer to raise this insignificant disc to the dignity of a definite genre' – he was perturbed by the idea that Ellington might dare to write longer pieces in a jazz idiom.

> 'His are the only jazz records worth studying for their form as well as their texture'

But Ellington was not going to be held back in this regard, and in 1937 he recorded *Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue*. More important than the unusually extended length of the piece (listeners had to flip the disc to hear the second half) was the fact that this extraordinary music disconcertedly engaged with techniques from modern classical music, with clear evidence of the influence of Stravinsky and others. Fragmentary ideas were thrown around the band in a seemingly incoherent but always compelling way. Not surprisingly, perhaps, the piece was not a hit, though it gained belated exposure when Ellington's band performed it at the Newport Jazz Festival in 1956. Somewhat ironically, given Ellington's views on improvisation, on that memorable occasion he allowed his tenor sax player, Paul Gonsalves, the opportunity to improvise a mind-blowingly virtuosic (and very long) solo.



Two crucial events in the early 1940s were to shape the rest of Ellington's career. First, he hired Billy Strayhorn as co-composer, a collaborator who intimately understood his style and contributed much wonderful music to the band's repertoire, including a new signature tune ('Take the "A" Train'). Second, his band started making annual appearances at New York's Carnegie Hall, from 1943 onwards. On the first of those occasions, he showcased a new 53-minute symphonic poem entitled *Black, Brown and Beige.* Never before had such an ambitious composition been presented by a jazz band. Instead of being celebrated as an extraordinary creative achievement, however, the piece fell between two critical stools: elitist classical musicians thought it was

GETTY

Rewriting the script: (left) Duke Ellington on the set of *Anatomy of a Murder* with director Otto Preminger and Billy Strayhorn, 1959; (far left) with US President Richard Nixon, 1969; (middle) Paul Gonsalves improvises at Newport, 1956; (bottom) the score for 'Black and Tan Fantasy'

pretentious, while jazz critics dismissed it because it wasn't jazzy enough. Clearly hurt by this mixed reception, Ellington declared in the same year that he would no longer be using the term 'jazz' to describe his music, as it was too limiting. And this experience had a longer-term consequence. Instead of developing his innate desire to write longer pieces, all of his later works were cast as suites, which meant short movements could be strung together in the context of a concept album. Among the most memorable were his Three Sacred Concerts (1965, '68 and '73), intended for live performance in cathedrals and large churches.

At the start of the 1960s, largely in a spirit of fun, Ellington recorded his and Strayhorn's witty interpretations of music by Tchaikovsky (*Nutcracker Suite*) and Grieg (*Peer Gynt*). Nobody seemed offended by the Tchaikovsky project, but the Grieg stirred up a veritable hornets' nest in Norway, where it was banned by the Grieg Foundation. This was ostensibly because Grieg's copyright (then still in force in his native country but not elsewhere in the world) had been infringed – but also reflected distaste at the idea of 'jazzing up' such nationally revered music in a way which had (as the Foundation's own wording put it) 'damaged the author's reputation'. Debate about the cultural and artistic implications of this decision raged on Norwegian state television and radio, while Norwegian jazz fans stole furtively across the border to listen to the album in Sweden. A satirical cartoon in a Norwegian newspaper showed two hip young trolls gleefully bopping to the strains of the illicit LP while an elderly troll turns his back on them in disgust, covering up his ears. Visiting Bergen in 1969 while on tour with his band, Ellington told the press he would never perform the piece again because all the fun had gone out of it and he'd been made to look like a fool.

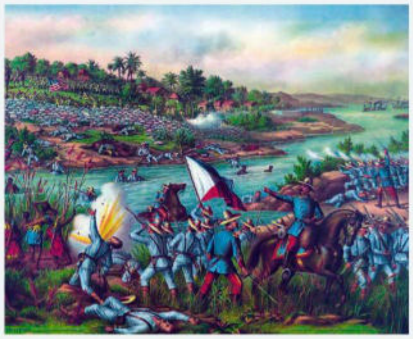
All of which is a sad reminder that, in those days, anyone bold enough to originate a meaningful bridge between the worlds of classical music and jazz was sticking their head on the block. But we can be thankful that Duke Ellington made the attempt, and enriched all our musical lives in the process.

DUKE ELLINGTON Life & Times

1899

LIFE: Edward Kennedy Ellington (later nicknamed 'Duke') is born on 29 April in Washington, DC. His father James, a butler and caretaker, and mother Daisy are both talented pianists.

TIMES: ***The Battle of Manila*** is the first major conflict in the Philippine-American War, caused by the US's refusal to acknowledge the Philippine Declaration of Independence.



1923

LIFE: Pianist of The Washingtonians, he enjoys a four-year engagement at the Club Kentucky in Harlem, NY, taking over as bandleader when banjo player ***Elmer Snowden*** leaves.

TIMES: Warren G Harding dies aged 57, midway through his term as the 29th president of the United States. He is succeeded in the post by vice president Calvin Coolidge.

1974

LIFE: He dies from lung cancer and pneumonia on 24 May, soon after his 75th birthday. Over 12,000 people attend his funeral at New York's Cathedral of St John the Divine.

TIMES: ***The Exorcist*** is nominated for ten Academy Awards, including 15-year-old Linda Blair for Best Supporting Actress, but loses out to *The Sting* for Best Picture.

1930

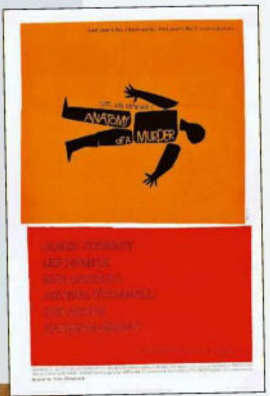
LIFE: Propelled to fame as house band at the Cotton Club in Harlem, Duke Ellington and his Orchestra enjoy worldwide success with recordings including the song 'Mood Indigo'.

TIMES: Harland Sanders serves chicken dishes and other meals at a Shell filling station near Corbin, Kentucky, founding what will become Kentucky Fried Chicken.

1943

LIFE: Telling the history of African Americans, his symphony-length jazz piece *Black, Brown and Beige* is premiered at Carnegie Hall, but receives mixed reviews.

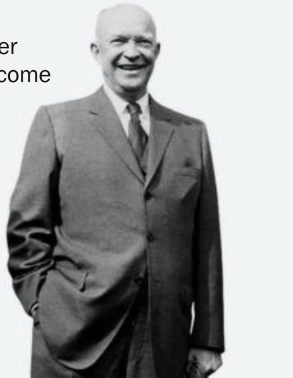
TIMES: Commissioned to hold the entire United States Department of War under one roof, the Pentagon is completed in Arlington, Virginia, becoming the world's largest office building.



1959

LIFE: He composes his first full-length film score, for ***Anatomy of a Murder,*** a courtroom drama starring James Stewart, Lee Remick and, briefly, Ellington himself.

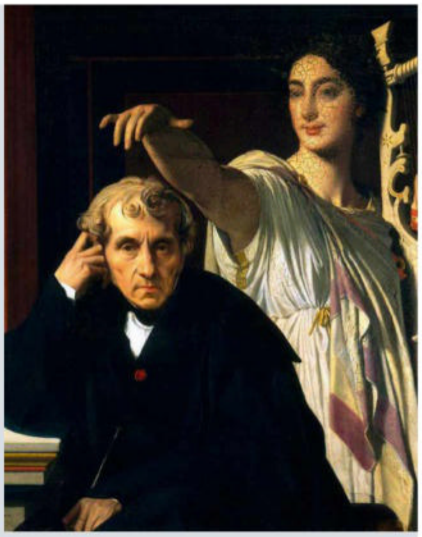
TIMES: Two months after Alaska has officially become the 49th state of the US, president ***Dwight D Eisenhower*** signs a bill that will lead to Hawaii becoming the 50th.



Luigi Cherubini

Médée

With its shockingly bloody ending and challenging title role, this Greek tragedy-inspired opera is not for the faint-hearted, ***George Hall*** reveals



The composer

Now hanging in the Louvre, Ingres's portrait *Luigi Cherubini and the Muse of Lyric Poetry* (above) was the result of the longstanding friendship between the composer and artist, cemented by their mutual interests – Ingres played the violin, Cherubini enjoyed painting. By the time of the portrait's completion and his own death in 1842, the Florence-born Cherubini was very much a Parisian, having moved there in the 1780s. Initially mixing in aristocratic circles did not prevent him pursuing a successful career after the Revolution, though later life saw him gravitate from opera to church music.

Building a Library is broadcast on Radio 3 at 3.30pm each Saturday as part of *Record Review*. A highlights podcast is available on BBC Sounds.

The work

As head of the Paris Conservatoire, Luigi Cherubini's run-ins with brilliant but unruly student Hector Berlioz, as recounted in the latter's *Memoirs*, have negatively impacted on our impressions of the great Italian-French composer ever since. Unfortunately, these attacks have tended to obscure the outstanding qualities of Cherubini's music itself, which as well as his rarely performed operas includes two exceptional settings of the Requiem, a series of string quartets and a symphony, written for London in 1815.

Having decided in his mid-20s to seek his fortune outside Italy – first in London (1785-6), then in Paris (permanently from 1788) – Cherubini succeeded in surviving the long upheavals of the French Revolutionary period by maintaining a discreet distance from political trouble while occasionally writing works that sided with the regime. Simultaneously, he was building a high reputation for a series of operas whose mostly serious subjects were dealt with in highly original scores that captured the spirit of the age in their ambitious inventiveness and sheer novelty.

Works such as *Lodoïska* (1791), *Médée* (1797) and *Les deux journées* (1800) drew on classical models yet infused them with strikingly modern feeling and musical gestures, placing their author on the very border between Classicism and Romanticism. Beethoven became a huge fan, telling the visiting English composer Cipriani Potter in Vienna in 1817 that, of all his contemporaries, he regarded the Paris-based Italian more highly than any other: something that can readily be heard – if you know Cherubini's originals – in the German's own music. Sadly, Beethoven's admiration was not returned.

Médée itself became a particularly well respected piece – Brahms once described it as 'the work we musicians recognise among ourselves as the peak of dramatic music.' But it has nevertheless remained infrequently performed, partly due to the near impossibility of locating a soprano able to carry off the hugely challenging title role, but also, perhaps, to a narrative that enters boldly upon some very shocking dramatic material indeed.

Brahms once described *Médée* as 'the work we recognise as the peak of dramatic music'

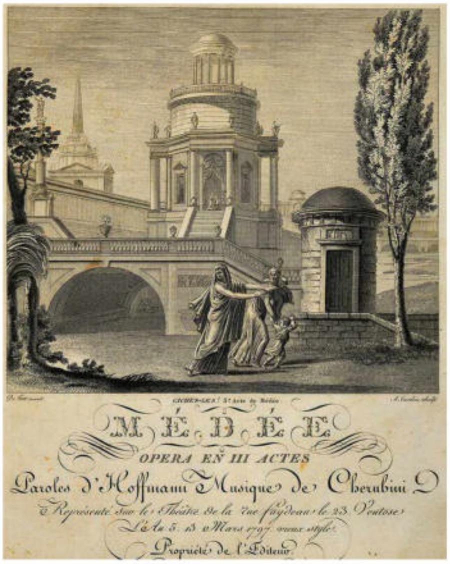
François Benoît Hoffman's libretto for *Médée* is derived from Greek myth, as told by Euripides, via the tragedy by Pierre Corneille (1635). And a gruesome tale it tells too. Having aided the adventurer Jason in acquiring the famed Golden Fleece, the treasure of her father and his people in Colchis – a far distant land on the shores of the Black Sea, comprising parts of modern Turkey and Georgia – the sorceress Médée has fled with her lover, not even balking at murdering her own brother to aid their escape. She has subsequently borne Jason two children. Now, years later and safely in Corinth, Jason wishes to cast Médée aside and marry instead Dircé, daughter of King

Greek bearing gifts: Maria Callas performs the role of Medea in London, 1959; (below) a poster for the original performance, Paris, 1797

Créon. All fear Médée's vengeance, but Créon allows her one further day before she must go into permanent exile – she uses this brief period to kill her rival by giving her a robe and crown containing poison that burns Dircé up at her wedding to Jason. Then she turns her attention to Jason's and her own children, both of whom she stabs to death.

The original French work was an *opéra-comique* – not (self-evidently!) a comic opera as the name might suggest, but one with spoken dialogue. Though it enjoyed limited success in France, it took off in Germany, where other composers keen to praise it included Weber, Schumann and Wagner. For a Frankfurt production in 1855, the minor composer Franz Lachner replaced the spoken dialogue with sung recitatives that soon became standard, despite their post-Wagnerian stylistic incongruity.

Medea (as it was called in Italian) appeared twice in Italian translation in London in the mid-19th century, but the first performance in Italy was given only in 1909 in a new translation by Carlo Zangarini – one of Puccini's librettists. The main characters were now named Medea, Giasone, Glauce (formerly Dircé) and Creonte. In this form, the work was revived in the postwar period for Maria Callas – who would prove to be the title-role's ideal interpreter – initially in Florence in 1953 under the baton of Vittorio Gui. In all, Callas would sing the role live on 31 occasions – as well as a La Scala studio recording under Tullio Serafin (1957), there are live recordings in which she stars from Florence (1953), La Scala (under Leonard Bernstein, 1953), Dallas (1958), Covent Garden (1959) and again La Scala (1961), all in sound that is a good deal less than ideal. Other performances in Venice (1954) and Epidaurus (1961) have left no sonic record.


MÉDÉE
OPERA EN III ACTES
Paroles d'Hoffman Musique de Cherubini
Représenté sur le Théâtre de la rue Faydeau le 23 Ventose
L'An 5. 13 Mars 1797 vieux style
Propriété de l'Editeur

GETTY

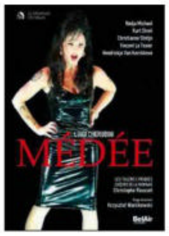
Many sopranos and conductors have followed Callas's example in using this inauthentic Italian-language, through-sung edition, though over more recent decades productions and recordings have begun to return to the original French and to spoken dialogue, either that of the original libretto (though often with cuts) or a completely new text. Although Callas inevitably looms large in any survey of the work's recordings, there are other possibilities, including some that return to a French text, if not always to Hoffman's original spoken dialogue.

Turn the page to discover our recommended recordings of Luigi Cherubini's Médée

Fearsome priestess: soprano Nadja Michael is commanding in the role of Médée

The best recording

A darkly powerful presentation



Christophe Rousset *(conductor)*
Nadja Michael (Médée), Kurt Streit (Jason) et al; Les Talens Lyriques
BelAir Classiques BAC076/476 (DVD or Blu-ray)

Filmed at La Monnaie in Brussels in 2011, director Krzysztof Warlikowski's thrilling staging is sung in French, though with a new spoken text by the director and Christian Longchamp, which generally works well. Broadly in modern dress – there are only sporadic and tokenistic visual references to ancient Greece – the production is sharply and convincingly directed, conveying the ancient drama in a modern setting and with some references to the opera house where it is performed. Warlikowski spares the audience nothing of this dark tale and his cast commits entirely to the piece and its production.

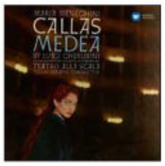
Preceding the opera proper is a grainy old video featuring two small boys playing on holiday at the seaside and a joyous period wedding (a reference to, rather than depiction of, Jason and Médée's). The silent children – remarkably acted by young boys – are a frequent and unsettling presence throughout. During the overture the old footage alternates with the present. The boys are shown with a clear hostility towards their new mother, Dircé; later on, they refuse to embrace her.

Taken as a whole, this is a remarkable musical and dramatic experience

Christophe Rousset's period-instrument orchestra provides a powerful version of Cherubini's overture. Favouring fast tempos, as an interpreter Rousset may arguably be less observant than Tullio Serafin or Leonard Bernstein (above), but his realisation of the score is neat, precise and potent. The individual dramatic performances offer psychologically complex portrayals. If not in the Callas class, Nadja Michael's dramatically commanding performance as Médée is often estimable, if vocally uneven; she is at her best in the spoken dialogue. Initially she is presented visually as a Goth, based on the late pop singer Amy Winehouse.

Kurt Streit's Jason is beautifully sung in the lighter-voiced French tradition,

Three other great recordings



Tullio Serafin (conductor)

Maira Callas's 1957 studio recording under Tullio Serafin is sonically her best version; though she is not in such commanding voice as under Bernstein, there is still artistic greatness in every word and note. Serafin takes a more classical view of the piece than Bernstein and makes fewer cuts, while building steadily towards the horrific finale. Near the beginning of her career, Renata Scotto expresses Glauce's fear and foreboding. Miriam Pirazzini's Neris empathises with her vengeful friend at every turn and Mirto Picchi gives a good account of Giasone. *(Warner Classics 2564634083)*

Leonard Bernstein (conductor)

The poor sound would not be acceptable except in such special circumstances as this live 1953 La Scala recording, in which Callas is inimitable in declamation, intensity and sheer vocal power – her fearless performance is as imaginative as anything she ever did. Fedora Barbieri is impressive as her confidante Neris, with the other secondary roles decently done, though the La Scala chorus disappoints. Leonard Bernstein sets a furious pace in Cherubini's finely composed overture and throughout his conducting is infused with dramatic tension. *(Warner Classics 0190295844608)*

Bart Folse (conductor)
Claiming to be the first complete recording (1999), this is the only version currently offering the entire original French text, including the (arguably too long) original dialogue. The period-instrument playing also marks it as a serious, groundbreaking enterprise. Not all of the singing is of the highest level, but the use of smaller voices matched to similarly scaled orchestral and choral forces places *Médée* firmly within the classical tradition of Gluck's tragedies, giving us an idea of the soundworld Cherubini might have expected. *(Newport Classics NPD 85622/2)*

And one to avoid...

One of two studio recordings suavely conducted by Lamberto Gardelli, whose interpretation is not as characterful as either Serafin's or Bernstein's, this 1977 release stars Sylvia Sass attempting to follow in Callas's footsteps. Vocally, she throws what she has at the role, but it's not always enough, while her tone is apt to curdle. Magda Kalmár rustles up a nervous but sweetly sung Glauce, while Veriano Luchetti's Giasone offers commitment if not quite enough heft. Excellent orchestra, weak chorus.

quite different from the Italian approach – Warlikowski's staging makes clear that he still has feelings for his former lover – and Hendrickje Van Kerckhove gives a fine account of the insecure, almost perpetually overwrought Dircé.

Morally uncertain and again fearful of Médée's anger, Vincent Le Texier's Créon is vivid, if somewhat roughly voiced, and Christianne Stotijn is highly sympathetic as Médée's confidante Néris, particularly expressive in her mournful second-act aria with bassoon obbligato. Taken as a whole, this is a remarkable musical and dramatic experience, fully worthy of the opera itself.

BERNARD COUTANT, GETTY

Baroque horror: Sarah Connolly as Charpentier's Médée; (below) composer Gaspare Spontini

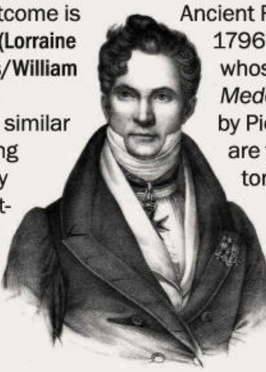
Continue the journey...

We suggest five works to explore after Luigi Cherubini's Médée

Médée is the only one of **Cherubini**'s operas to be regularly performed today, but his *Lodoïska* of 1791 was very successful in his day, due in part to the popularity of 'rescue operas' following the recent fall of the Bastille. Set in 17th-century Poland, the rescue in this instance is that of the title character, saved from the clutches of the tyrant Dourlinski by her lover Floreski and some helpful Tartars. **(Nathalie Manfrino et al; Le Cercle de L'Harmonie/ Rhorer** *Naïve AM209***)**

> Cimarosa's tale is one of personal torment and, ultimately, grim bloodshed

Around a century earlier, **Marc-Antoine Charpentier** also tackled the subject of Medea. His five-act *Médée* of 1693 differs from Cherubini's opera in that the Baroque composer begins the narrative further back, exploring the relationship between Medea and Jason before the seeds of suspicion and jealousy have been sown. The bloody outcome is much the same, however. **(Lorraine Hunt et al; Les Arts Florissants/William Christie** *(Erato 4509965582)*



Gaspare Spontini trod a similar path to Cherubini, beginning his career in his native Italy before finding fame in post-Revolutionary France. His masterpiece was 1807's *La vestale*, set in Rome in the third century BC. Appointed a priestess of Vesta, Julia allows the sacred flame to go out while canoodling with the Roman general Licinius, a misdemeanour warranting the death penalty. There is, however, a twist... **(Marina Rebeka et al; Les Talens Lyriques/Rousset** *Bru Zane BZ1051***)**

Another 18th-century composer to take inspiration from the plays of Euripides was **Christoph Willibald Gluck**, whose *Iphigénie en Aulide* was presented to Paris in 1774. Here, the unfortunate title character, daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, is set to be made a human sacrifice as the Greeks pray for favourable winds to take them to Troy. Ready to fight her corner, however, is her lover, Achilles. **(Judith van Wanroij et al; Le Concert de La Loge/Chauvin** *Alpha ALPHA1073***)**

Finally, we head to the earliest days of Ancient Rome for **Domenico Cimarosa**'s 1796 opera *Gli Orazi e I Curiazi*, whose libretto, like Cherubini's *Medée*, is derived from a tragedy by Pierre Corneille. And similarly, we are told a dramatic tale of personal torment, split family loyalties and, ultimately, grim bloodshed. **(Giulietta Simionato et al; Orchestra Sinfonica di Milano Della Rai/Carlo Maria Giulini** *(Urania URN22264)***)**

Reviews

Recordings and books rated by expert critics

Welcome

There's a thrilling feeling of rediscovery this month, with albums of music subject to censorship, arias and a cello concerto lost to time, and a book reframing the role of Black women artists in shaping Chicago's classical music story. We also have the first ever recording of Michael Tippett's final opera, *New Year,* not to mention works given new leases of life – or recast, if you will. Those include Bach Lute Suites transcribed for piano, and Holst's mighty *The Planets* suite played on the organ of Salisbury Cathedral.

We have 'New Baroque' too, a piano concerto composed by Stephen Hough, a wonderful new cantata by British composer Gavin Higgins, plus plenty of old favourites and a trip around the latest World Music releases.

Michael Beek *Reviews editor*

This month's critics

John Allison, Nicholas Anderson, Michael Beek, Terry Blain, Geoff Brown, Michael Church, Christopher Cook, Martin Cotton, Christopher Dingle, Misha Donat, Rebecca Franks, George Hall, Malcolm Hayes, Claire Jackson, Stephen Johnson, Berta Joncus, Nicholas Kenyon, Ashutosh Khandekar, Erik Levi, Natasha Loges, Andrew McGregor, David Nice, Freya Parr, Ingrid Pearson, Steph Power, Anthony Pryer, Paul Riley, Suzanne Rolt, Jan Smaczny, Jo Talbot, Anne Templer, Kate Wakeling

KEY TO STAR RATINGS

★★★★★	Outstanding
★★★★	Excellent
★★★	Good
★★	Disappointing
★	Poor

RECORDING OF THE MONTH

A reminder of music's life-affirming power

Kate Wakeling delights in this beautiful musical melting pot from cellist, vocalist and composer Abel Selaocoe and friends

Abel Selaocoe
Hymns of Bantu

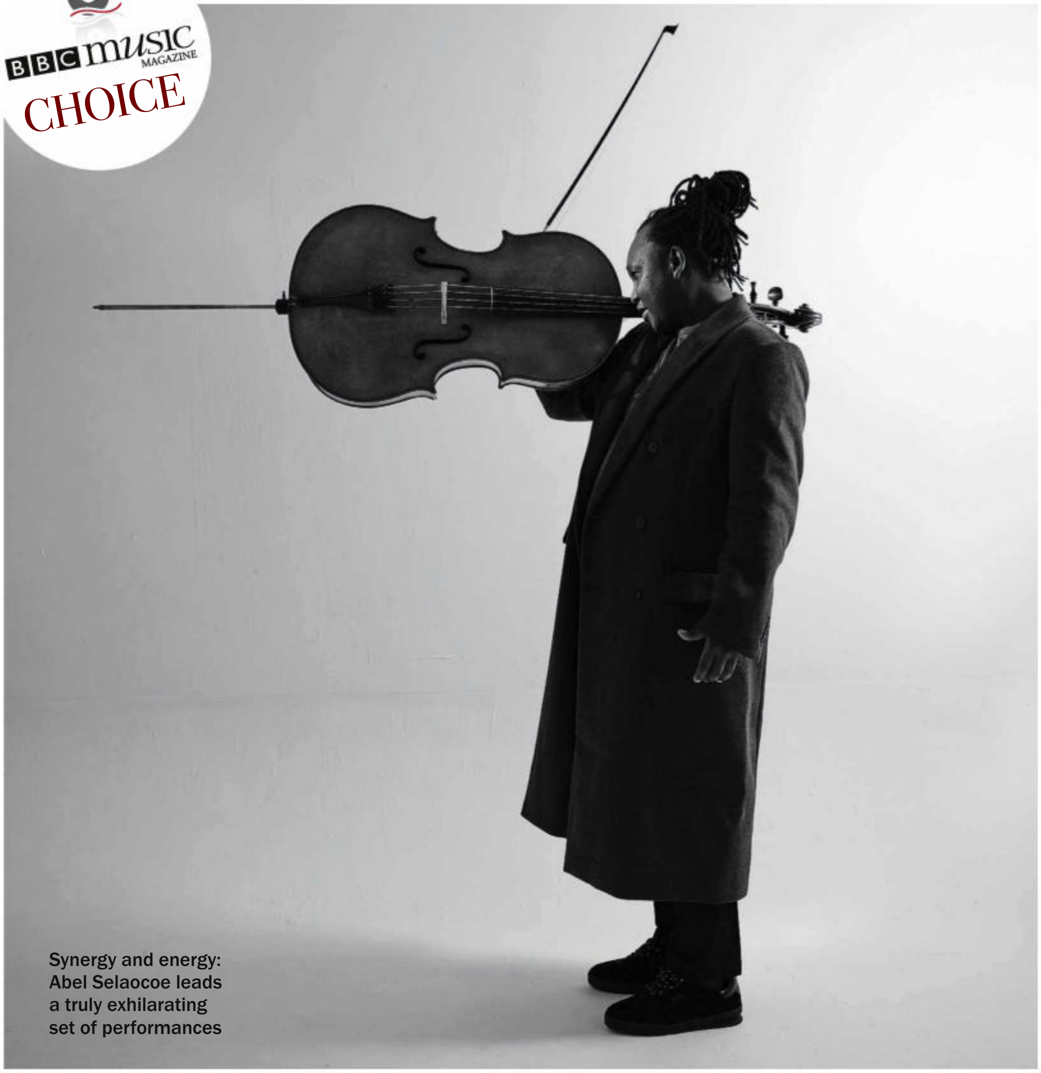
Hymns of Bantu

Works by JS Bach, Marais, Abel Selaocoe et al
Abel Selaocoe (cello, vocal); Bantu Ensemble; Manchester Collective et al
Warner Classics 2173245895
55:34 mins

'When you come from a diverse mix of cultures,' says Abel Selaocoe, South African cellist, vocalist and composer, 'you don't choose how things come together and how the DNA congeals, but in this land of incredible rhythm all of this stuff becomes part of your ancestral memory.' Selaocoe has been making waves ever since bursting onto the classical music scene in 2016 with his genre-breaking ensemble Chesaba. Fusing the musical heritage of South Africa with Western classical repertoire and techniques, Selaocoe has created a distinct and beautiful soundworld, which this ambitious new album takes to a new level.

Hymns of Bantu is grounded in the modal scales and overtone harmonic systems of South African music before the introduction of Western four-part harmony, and the album's 12 tracks feature a broad mix of instrumental line-ups, blending solo cello, African percussion, string orchestra and electric bass in various formations. The music moves between arresting new arrangements of Bantu music and works by Bach and Marais, chosen carefully to illustrate the musical synergies between these seemingly contrasting traditions. In the composer's words, 'The crux of the album is about celebrating those that have come before us, and how we are all connected. It's allowing classical music to again sit in the same space as where I'm from – allowing Bach to sit next to overtones and the world of throat singing.'

The result is powerful, inventive and irresistibly



Synergy and energy: Abel Selaocoe leads a truly exhilarating set of performances

PARLOPHONE RECORDS LTD

enjoyable. The first track takes the famous South African hymn *Tsohle Tsohle* (meaning 'everything is everything' in Sesotho) as its springboard, settling into a gentle groove overlaid with swirling strings from Manchester Collective and soaring improvised vocals from Selaocoe. The gloriously upbeat *Emmanuele* is an exhilarating highlight of the album and features the dream-team percussion trio of Sidiki Dembele, Dudù Kouate and Fred Thomas.

Much of the album is driven by such rhythmic dynamism, but there are also many welcome moments of introspection, including the lullaby-like *Tshepo I*, where Selaocoe's voice is at its tenderest, and *Voices of Bantu* which melds an improvised response to Marais's *Pièces de viole, Livre II, Suite No. 3* with some extraordinary overtone singing from Selaocoe.

A thoughtful reimagining of the *Sarabande* from Bach's Cello Suite No. 6 in D Major, BWV 1012 is another standout moment, heard here in a sumptuous arrangement by Fred Thomas for cello and string ensemble. Selaocoe renders the solo cello line with great beauty and assurance, while the special intimacy of the recording quality – the sounds of breath and the contact between fingers and strings lightly audible throughout – reminds us of the vital, embodied nature of musical performance with poignant intensity.

> Selaocoe renders the solo cello line of the Bach with great beauty and assurance

This is an utter delight of an album, offering a potent reminder of the life-affirming power of music to bring joy, and to begin to right the wrongs of the past. For Selaocoe, the album is about 'taking what once hurt and turning it around, since when I listen to South African hymnal music it doesn't ring of colonial hurt. It just rings of healing.'

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Performer's notes
Abel Selaocoe

How would you describe the music of the Bantu people?
The Bantu are such a diverse range of people, from one of the most diverse groups in the world, geographically. And I think that speaks to the universality of where and how things connect us. So the music represents a kind of universal connection that everybody feeds on; ways of building community, ways of remembering our ancestors and using our voice as a powerful tool to survive in the world.

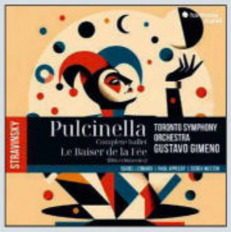
Your gigs are full of energy. How do you distil that in a recording?
I work in the moment. I feel like I need to be somewhat hot-headed or unhinged in my expression, if that's what is needed for the music. I try not to think of it as a recording experience that needs to be bottled, but an emotion that needs to be passed on. It's important to pass on that feeling for the music, so I always have a performative feeling on albums.

Tell us about working with Manchester Collective...
They are a home away from home. It's a real opportunity to work with classical musicians and teach them my language. It's not an easy process to bring people into music that they've never been associated with culturally, and to give them an idea of how it happens. It's such a beautiful and special bond that is quite hard to have anywhere else, because it requires time.

Why do you like to mix Bach and Bantu music?
I grew up playing Bach Suites at home, and I couldn't separate them because they lived in the same place. I think allowing them to continue to do that empowers each of them.

Orchestral

ORCHESTRAL CHOICE



This complete *Pulcinella* is a real glut of musical riches

David Nice enjoys generous portions and fine playing in this Toronto take on Stravinsky's brilliant ballet

All or nothing (mostly): Gustavo Gimeno likes to programme works often only heard in suite form

Stravinsky • Kelly-Marie Murphy

Stravinsky: Pulcinella; The Fairy's Kiss – Divertimento; **Kelly-Marie Murphy:** Curiosity, Genius, and the Search For Petula Clark
Toronto Symphony Orchestra/Gustavo Gimeno et al
Harmonia Mundi HMM905384 75 mins

Everything on this album is so fine and focused, so let me get the only caveat out of the way. Gustavo Gimeno writes in the booklet note that he has 'always been attracted to pieces that are very popular in suite form but rarely presented in their entirety' – then goes and gives us, yes, the complete *Pulcinella* ballet, but only the *Divertimento* from *The Fairy's Kiss*. So the question is would it have been better to have the whole of Stravinsky's very piquant and loving homage to Tchaikovsky instead of *Curiosity, Genius, and the Search for Petula Clark*, by Canadian composer Kelly-Marie Murphy?

Frankly, yes, though the TSO needs to honour its commission. Murphy's take on Glenn Gould hearing 'Pet' on a road journey is entertaining enough, but a tad stop-start – and without the instrumental precision we find at every point in the two Stravinsky scores. This is perhaps the most sheerly lovely *Pulcinella* I've heard, slightly romanticised with a full-orchestral richness rather than the spring of a chamber ensemble. But to match the beautifully recorded artistry of the woodwind especially, Gimeno has gone for full-bodied operatic voices rather than a Pergolesi-and-friends authenticity (which of course wasn't Stravinsky's intention either). Paul Appleby and Derek Welton are splendid; Isabel Leonard, despite a hint of flatness right at the top, is excellent with the texts. The wind and horns continue to excel in the enchantment of the Andersen-based fairy tale, suggesting that Gimeno and his Canadians might tackle the three Tchaikovsky ballets. Complete, of course.

> This is perhaps the most sheerly lovely *Pulcinella* I've heard

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

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Ravel

Daphnis et Chloé
Tenebrae; London Symphony Orchestra/Antonio Pappano
LSO Live LSO0899 54:32 mins

How do we engage with a ballet score shorn of its choreography? Opera recordings have the crutch of words to focus minds on an unfolding narrative. Yet when the storyteller is as gripping as Ravel, and the storytelling falls to Antonio Pappano, the drama mesmerises. He's a conductor for whom the visceral immediacy of the stage is allied to a forensic grasp of the dots on the page, and the symbiosis is potent: Ravel subtitled *Daphnis et Chloé* 'symphonie chorégraphique' and Pappano is effortlessly adept at keeping the subtle structural coherence and unfolding story in perfect equilibrium.

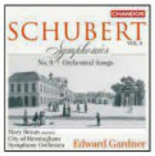
At home in the music's sultry languor as in its bacchanalian excess, he's never intimidated by the virtuosic orchestral soundscapes. And he moulds the LSO into a single instrument, ravishingly refined, alert to every diaphanous nuance and felicity of phrasing.

Serenely poised, the Introduction is lovingly calibrated, and Pappano conjures a filigree delicacy as the Act begins to unfold – Daphnis's dance is as 'light and gracious' as Ravel instructs, although Dorcon's clunky attempt is perhaps a touch polite. Calling on Tenebrae to supply the wordless choral contributions is luxury casting indeed, but their polish might have benefitted from a little haziness for the opening of Act 2. Les Siècles offer ear-opening period instrument insights; John Wilson and his Sinfonia of London a scholarly spring-clean and unbiddable eloquence on Chandos; but, persuasively paced and rapturously realised, this newcomer has nothing to fear in their elevated company. *Paul Riley*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Schubert

Symphony No. 9; Orchestral Songs*
*Mary Bevan (soprano); City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra/Edward Gardner
Chandos CHSA5354 67:24 mins



Conductor Edward Gardner enterprisingly couples Schubert's 'Great' C major Symphony with some of the composer's songs in orchestral garb. In the case of the 'Romanze' the orchestration is Schubert's own, since the song is lifted from his incidental music to the play *Rosamunde*; but the remaining transcriptions were made by distinguished other hands. Particularly beautiful are Reger's arrangement of 'Im Abendrot', with its oboe solo at the start; and Brahms's of 'Geheimes', where the tiptoeing two-note phrases suggesting complicity in a secret love are given to muted strings. The rapid-fire repeated octaves of 'Erlkönig' which strike terror into the heart of all lieder pianists are a good deal easier to bring off when transferred to orchestral strings, as in Berlioz's arrangement, and although Mary Bevan may not manage to suggest the varied voices of the ballad's protagonists, the purity of her tone is a real pleasure throughout these songs.

Edward Gardner takes a fairly traditional view of the Ninth Symphony, making an *accelerando* at the end of its slow introduction to gain the tempo of the main *Allegro*, and applying the brakes when the introduction's theme comes back right at the end in order to lend the moment a feeling of grandeur. Schubert actually writes the theme's return in notes of double the value they had at the symphony's beginning, suggesting that the *Allegro* moves at more or less twice the speed of the introduction, and it is possible to do the piece without the gear changes. But Gardner's approach works well, too, and the addition of the songs in the programme makes this conclusion to his Schubert symphonies cycle with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra an attractive proposition. *Misha Donat*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Sibelius

Symphonies Nos 6 & 7;
The Tempest
Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra/
Santtu-Matias Rouvali
Alpha Classics ALPHA1130
66:29 mins

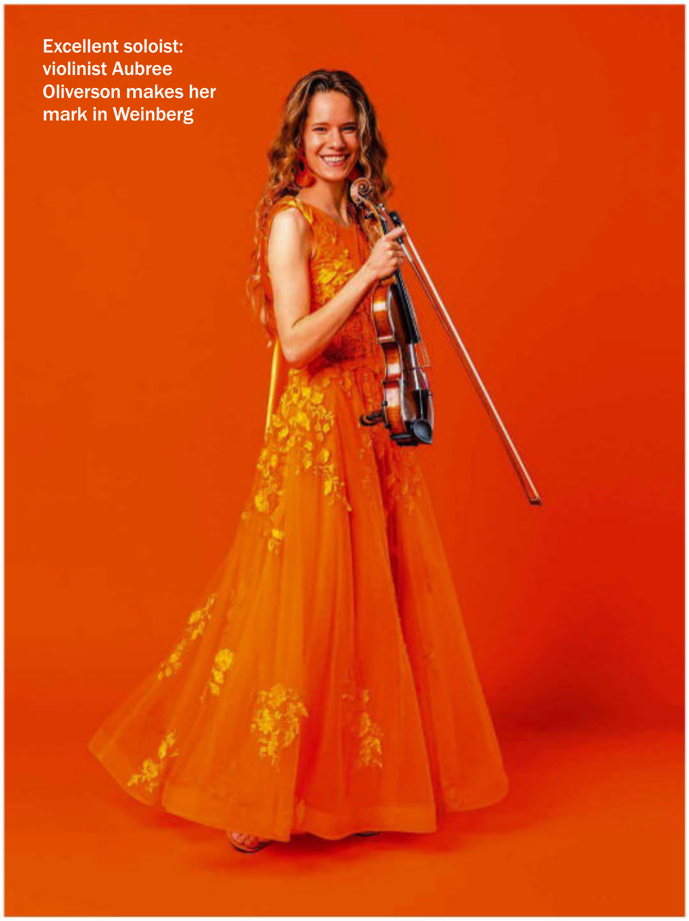
Finland's high-powered musical education system continues to produce a remarkable sequence of young conductors. This final instalment of Santtu-Matias Rouvali's Sibelius symphonies cycle showcases an evident talent – one with a real way of adding value to a fine orchestra's contribution, besides (thankfully) only a slight tendency to the sort of point-making that gets in the way. It does no harm to pay straightforward attention to Sibelius's sparing, but no-nonsense tempo and dynamic markings. Rouvali does exactly this in the Sixth Symphony's opening, with the strings' serene middle-volume opening phrase then restated more quietly – as the score says, and with the music's open-air loveliness already perfectly captured. The spell never lets up from then on, with the Gothenburg strings wonderfully expressive in the finale's closing bars.

Rouvali's 'selection' from the incidental music for Shakespeare's *The Tempest* is the complete second of the two published suites, minus the sub-standard 'Dance Episode' that concludes it. Some of the music treads a fine line between urbane charm and blandness, but again Rouvali brings out its unpretentious appeal at its best. The success of his approach to the Seventh Symphony is more uneven. Rouvali handles the crucial tempo shifts of the work's single-movement design with much sureness. So it's a surprise that, after the opening *Adagio* section is impressively delivered, the transition for divided strings that grows out of this is taken at a quicker pace, damagingly undercutting the music's spaciousness and breadth; and then, sure enough, the brakes have to be put on for the arrival of the symphony's main solo trombone theme. The rest of the interpretation recovers from this miscue; but it should not have had to.
Malcolm Hayes

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Censored Anthems

Works by Mirzoyan, Shostakovich and Weinberg
Aubree Oliverson, Joel Lambdin (violin), Arya Balian (soprano) et al; Parlando/Ian Niederhoffer
Delos DE3610 74:47 mins



Excellent soloist: violinist Aubree Oliverson makes her mark in Weinberg

Censored Anthems is the very catchy yet appposite title for this vividly recorded release featuring 20th-century works by three composers that for different reasons fell victim to the vagaries of disapproval from the Soviet regime. The programme opens with a sensitively performed arrangement for string orchestra of Katerina's aria from Act 1 Scene 3 of Shostakovich's opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* which the composer had originally transcribed for string quartet in 1931. Heard in this richer instrumentation, the *Adagio* conveys a bleak, almost helpless feeling of loneliness, and in so doing, seems to prophecy the trauma the composer would experience after the opera fell victim to Stalinist condemnation in 1936.

Twelve years later, Polish-born composer Mieczysław Weinberg was ostracised as a result of the ruthless persecution of Jewish artists during Stalin's notorious anti-cosmopolitan campaign. The decidedly tense yet introverted *Concertino*, which Weinberg composed during that year, poignantly mirrors these dangerous times. Although there are several fine recordings of this work, most notably from Gidon Kremer and Linus Roth, this new version, featuring the excellent Aubree Oliverson, can certainly hold its own in such august company.

The most extended work is Edvard Mirzoyan's Symphony for String Orchestra and Timpani which was composed in the 1960s at a time when its composer suppressed the conventional Soviet style of writing of his earlier output, and returned to his national roots, creating a work whose melodic lines are based on Armenian folk music. It's powerfully direct music that packs quite a punch in this compelling performance, and a bonus track in which conductor Ian Niederhoffer lucidly explains the trajectory of this unfamiliar work against a background of salient music examples, certainly helps to bring it to life. *Erik Levi*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

MARCO BORGGREVE, NICK BAYLESS

Concerto

CONCERTO CHOICE

A ‘lost’ cello concerto worth discovering

Jo Talbot enjoys Widor’s rarely performed work and is won over by this pairing

Lalo • Widor

Cello Concertos
Graham du Plessis (cello);
Mecklenburgische Staatskapelle
Schwerin/Māris Kupčs
Solaire SOL1019 59:42 mins

Widor’s Cello Concerto of 1877 was premiered in 1882 but appears to have only had one performance. It’s possible that the work was considered to be old fashioned in comparison with the sparkling First Concerto of 1872 by Saint-Saëns or Lalo’s more melodramatic Concerto of 1876. Whatever the case, Widor’s Concerto is definitely worth hearing, particularly as the original manuscript is used for this recording which offers numerous differences to the printed cello part, in terms of both tessitura and invention. Graham de Plessis’s technically brilliant and persuasively eloquent reading is well characterised, and the contribution from the Mecklenburgische Staatskapelle Schwerin under Māris Kupčs is neat and strongly supportive.

Partnering this ‘lost’ work with Lalo’s well-known Concerto is an inspired choice, especially as the latter work’s fervent and stormy unison opening marks such a striking contrast to the more classically cast Widor. Du Plessis, supported by expressive orchestral playing, gives a powerfully intense rendition, but is open to delicacy at a moment’s notice. For years, I confess I’ve been rather ambivalent about this concerto, but this has persuaded me of its worth. The emotional temperature is carefully calibrated, and the ebb and flow of the tempos convincing. The second movement *Intermezzo* is charming without being overdone, as is the spontaneous approach to the quasi-improvised introduction to the finale. Thereafter, the brilliant cello melodies take command, Du Plessis achieving an ideal balance between technical brilliance and expressive intensity.

> Graham du Plessis gives a powerfully intense rendition

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Wowing in Widor: Graham du Plessis’s technique and expression impress

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Barber • Sibelius

Sibelius: Violin Concerto in D minor
Barber: Violin Concerto
Renaud Capuçon (violin);
Orchestre de la Suisse Romande/
Daniel Harding
Erato 9029505852 55:13 mins

A French violinist, a Swiss orchestra and recording space, and an English conductor: such a mix is not unusual in the international world of classical music. But when the Violin Concerto is Sibelius’s – a work whose aesthetic has been linked by some commentators to Finland’s runic song traditions – it’s reasonable to ponder how the composer, a violinist himself, might have felt about the present account.

Would he have welcomed the gulping *portamento* often applied by Renaud Capuçon as he approaches key top notes? Possibly so, given performing styles prevailing in the early 20th century. Would he have relished the way the recording acoustic and Daniel Harding’s conducting turn numerous orchestral climaxes into brash and shrill blasts of sound? Probably not, for such overkill scarcely aids the Sibelius principle of organic growth. The strong-arm approach of soloist and conductor does at least bring partial benefits: Capuçon’s emotions are never veiled, and the forceful drive towards the concerto’s finish removes any fear of fussy dithering during the tricky final bars.

Overall, Capuçon and Harding’s skills are better suited to the collision of European romantic sensibility and American swagger in Samuel Barber’s Violin Concerto, which was premiered in 1941. Once again, orchestral climaxes as recorded too easily become overpowering: so much for the booklet note raising expectations of ‘a form of musical conversation that approaches the dimensions of chamber music’. But Capuçon’s sturdy tone and flying fingers make exciting work of the borderline preposterous finale, marked *Presto in moto perpetuo*, and very *perpetuo* indeed. And where would this ardent, high-pressure concerto be without musicians giving the work their heart and soul? File this album under ‘Mixed blessings’.
Geoff Brown

PERFORMANCE ★★★
RECORDING ★★★

Stewart Goodyear • Mendelssohn • Schumann

Schumann: Piano Concerto in A minor; **Stewart Goodyear:** Rhapsody; **Mendelssohn:** Piano Concerto No. 1 in G minor
Stewart Goodyear (piano); BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra/
Andrew Constantine
Orchid Classics ORC100365 63:57 mins

Mendelssohn's First Piano Concerto is a frothing sherbet lemon of a work, with zinging virtuosic outer movements and a bittersweet *andante*. It's everywhere you listen; Beatrice Rana is currently touring it, Isata Kanneh-Mason recently recorded it (Decca) and programmers can't get enough of it. Stewart Goodyear's account fizzes along with the best of them, excelling especially in the final *presto*, where Andrew Constantine and the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra provide extra zest and some dramatic speed contrasts. Goodyear is cut from the same cloth as the pianist-composers of yesteryear, and his own – often highly virtuosic and imaginative – music integrates a multiplicity of styles. Two Goodyear works feature here: *Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso* has the virtuosic flavour of the Mendelssohn concerto, although the rhythms are firmly rooted in the sounds of sub-Saharan Africa. This popping pianistic firework was created for the postponed 2021 instalment of the Honens International Piano Competition (won by Illia Ovcharenko). The *Rondo* is edge-of-the-seat stuff, its drumming rhythms entangling with a bold octave-based melody that becomes impressionistic. That idiom is more fully explored in *Rhapsody*, composed around a similar time and framed as a memorial piece. It unravels with trademark Goodyear showmanship, yet, as you might expect, retains a softness. Romantic love is a theme running throughout the album – alongside a subtle play on romance versus Romanticism – bellied out with Robert Schumann's Piano Concerto, written for and premiered by Clara. Goodyear plays with liquidity (and a Gershwinesque approach to the first movement) that is generally well represented by this recording, made on the orchestra's home turf at City Halls in Glasgow. *Claire Jackson*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Stephen Hough

Piano Concerto*; Sonatina nostalgica; Partita
Stephen Hough (piano); *The Hallé/ Mark Elder
Hyperion CDA68455 39:12 mins

ANITA ZVONAR

Shot through with nostalgia Stephen Hough's newest album may be, but there's nothing twee or rose-tinted about his trip into the past. Instead, the polymath takes his cue from Stefan Zweig's memoir *The World of Yesterday*, harking back to pre-First World War Vienna, blends it with the once familiar figure of the pianist-composer, and wraps it all up in a concerto he was commissioned to write for a film set in the 1930s.

The result is a sophisticated, entertaining Piano Concerto that avoids pastiche yet cleverly evokes lost musical words. We hear Copland's America in the 'white-note' music, perhaps Bill Evans's too in the lilting waltz of the *Prelude-Cadenza*, although it's the whirl of the Viennese waltz that's evoked by the second movement variations. The Hallé's stylish strings are the perfect foil for Hough's deft pianism; at one moment we're being whisked round the ballroom, at the next the waltz is teetering on the edge of something darker – a musical metaphor familiar to any Ravel fan.

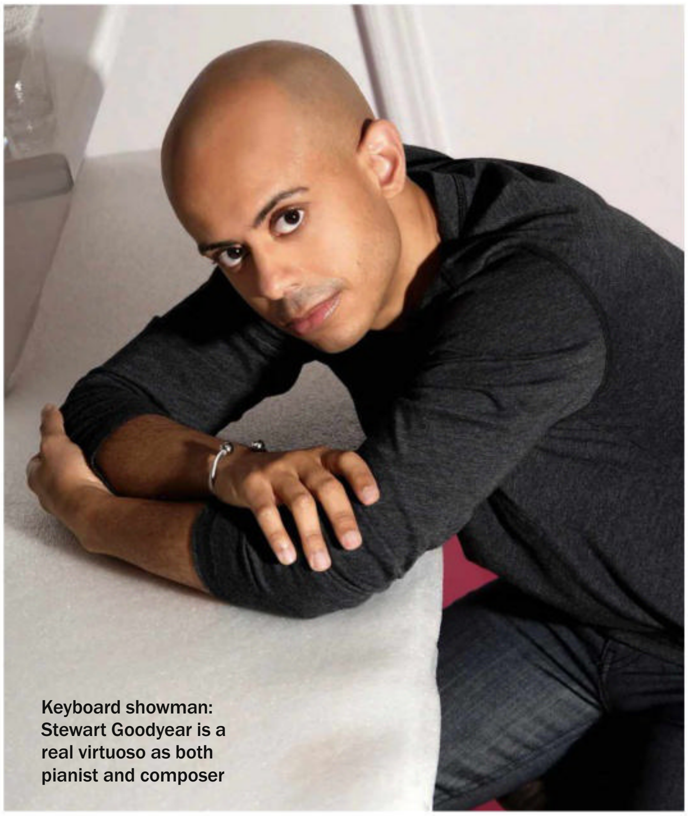
It all leads to an exhilarating finale, a *tarantella appassionata* which sends the strings soaring, the woodwind fluttering, the piano into Rachmaninov territory – and makes the world of yesterday sound like a riot. It's great fun.

Continuing the theme, the *Sonatina nostalgica* takes us down a personal memory lane, inspired by friends, family and familiar places from Hough's youth. The more substantial *Partita* takes us into a more public arena, giving us a taste of early- 20th-century style, whether that's pomp and ceremony or introverted Mompou. They're fine pieces, but it's the Piano Concerto that really makes the album – and surely will have a future. *Rebecca Franks*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Lalo • Saint-Saëns • Sarasate

Lalo: Symphonie espagnole; **Saint-Saëns:** Violin Concerto; **Sarasate:** Concert Fantasy on Bizet's Carmen
James Ehnes (violin); BBC Philharmonic/Juanjo Mena
Chandos CHAN20333
72:03 mins



Keyboard showman: Stewart Goodyear is a real virtuoso as both pianist and composer

Pablo de Sarasate is at the heart of this album. His name may only be on the cover for his *Concert Fantasy on Bizet's 'Carmen'*, but neither Lalo's evocative *Symphonie espagnole* nor Saint-Saëns's inventive Third Violin Concerto would exist without him. The rich body of works written for the great Spanish-born virtuoso would fill numerous albums, the three sparkling gems presented here by James Ehnes and the BBC Philharmonic under Sarasate's compatriot Juanjo Mena being among the best known.

The *Symphonie espagnole* is less a symphony than an extended violin concerto in which, even if there is no cadenza, the soloist is persistently centrestage throughout its five movements. Despite the fiery opening, its charm comes from the inherent lyricism, marvellously embodied by Ehnes, his violin singing magnificently even in the breathless outer sections of the *Scherzando* or the frequent virtuosic gymnastics throughout. The *Intermezzo* would not seem out of place in Sarasate's *Carmen Fantasy* and, as there, Ehnes is more strait-laced than teasingly seductive. Mena draws crisp, yet exuberantly colourful accompaniment from the BBC Philharmonic, all captured in customarily clear, attractively airy Chandos sound.

Even though it is the most frequently played of his violin concertos, it is puzzling that Saint-Saëns's third and final one is not more firmly embedded in the repertoire. Ehnes seamlessly negotiates the opening movement's juxtapositions of tautly gripping angst and relaxed reflection. A little more shape would be welcome at times during the lilting central *Andantino*, but there is plenty of charm and the final movement finds Ehnes at his best, fizzing with fleet-footed energy. *Christopher Dingle*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Tchaikovsky

Violin Concerto in D major; Swan Lake – Danse Russe; The Nutcracker Suite – Waltz of the Flowers; Valse-scherzo in C major etc
Christian Li (violin); Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra/ Vasily Petrenko
Decca 487 0360 56:01 mins

CHRISTIAN LI
TCHAIKOVSKY

It was a bold idea to start with fiery fantasy in Australian violinist Christian Li's assured performance of the *Danse Russe* from *Swan Lake*, well matched by a conductor new to me, Jascha von der Goltz. That's because much of the Violin Concerto's first movement (starting at track three) is aptly introspective, which might not make the right impression on those looking for sheer virtuosity. Fifteen when he recorded the main work on this Tchaikovsky album, keenly in sympathy with Vasily Petrenko and the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, Li already shows he's an artist, not just a violinist. The instinct, the right freedoms, are all there. The top of the range sometimes needs a bit more brilliant focus, and Petrenko allows too much lingering in the *Finale*, but there's boldness there in the second, rustic theme, and the *Canzonetta* is as lovely as they come, graced by poetic RLPO woodwind solos.

I can imagine Paul Campbell's arrangement of the *Waltz of the Flowers* from *The Nutcracker* would be a useful encore-with-orchestra; I could do without it here, but not the two waltzes with piano (Nicola Eimer, very personable, uncredited on the cover). The *Valse-scherzo* especially is a wonderful testament to Li's expressive freedom. You wouldn't expect a teenager to have much to say for the booklet note, and Li doesn't, but Charlotte Gardner steers the article well and he steers clear of soppiness. Besides, the proof is in the performances: another world-class violinist has arrived on the scene. *David Nice*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Walton

Violin Concerto*; Troilus and Cressida – Symphonic Suite; Portsmouth Point
*Charlie Lovell-Jones (violin); Sinfonia of London/John Wilson
Chandos CHSA5360 63:20 mins

CHANDOS
WALTON
VIOLIN CONCERTO

The Welsh violinist Charlie Lovell-Jones has often led John Wilson's Sinfonia of London as concertmaster, but this is his first recording as a concerto soloist. Very good it is too. Lovell-Jones brings a singing intensity of tone to the opening of Walton's Violin Concerto, immediately signalling a strong, focused interpretive temperament. There's no element of playing safe in the fiery outbursts of multi-stopping which come later, and Lovell-Jones's sharp-edged virtuosity brings both combustibility and caprice to the mercurial middle movement. The finale's dreamy, accompanied cadenza is another highlight, as is the Sinfonia's pungently attentive contribution throughout.

Purity and panache: trombonist Peter Moore conjures musical landscapes in Dove

BEN EALOVEGA

The other main item here is the Symphonic Suite from *Troilus and Cressida*, arranged from Walton's opera by Christopher Palmer. The suite has four movements, and the spitting brass and sweeping string writing are pungently caught by Chandos's physically impactful, big-screen recording. Delectably pointed wind playing launches the *Scherzo*, illustrating the 'playful, skittish and good-tempered' character of Pandarus (sung in the opera's 1954 premiere by Peter Pears). Wilson clearly relishes the sensual sweep of the ensuing 'The Lovers' movement, with its clamorous central climax dubbed 'pornographic' by the composer. A pair of poetically executed cor anglais solos graces the *Finale*, before the abrupt, crunching pay-off of Cressida's suicide.

An exuberant performance of the overture *Portsmouth Point* closes the programme. Here the Sinfonia of London confirms its reputation for crackling virtuosity, imparting a joyful athleticism to Walton's vaulting syncopation, and playful nautical inflections to the colourful wind writing. One hopes that further Wilson-Walton releases will follow. *Terry Blain*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Beyond

Thomas Adès: Three Piece Suite from Powder Her Face; **Matthew Aucoin:** Eurydice Suite; Heath; **Jonathan Dove:** Stargazer; **Nico Muhly:** Liar Suite from Marnie
Peter Moore (trombone); BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra/ Timothy Redmond
Orchid Classics ORC100368
81:58 mins

Conductor Timothy Redmond's album notes describe the project as 'a disc inspired by opera, but without singers'. There is no question that the forces used are enormous - this is orchestral writing at its most expansive - and brimming with creativity and ideas.

Thomas Adès's glorious *Three Piece Suite from Powder Her Face* illustrates the depth of ideas, with the opening tango illustrating mocking and swooping clarinets, raunchy and sleazy strings and great musical colouring. The second movement's witty waltz with violin harmonics and glimmering wisps of sound, followed by the *Finale*'s conversations between trumpets and bongos give us a broad sweep of racy landscapes, stuttering and teasing tempos and flying brass, piano and percussion. This modern and timeless suite demands attention, leaving the listener open-mouthed and at times laughing.

There is less obvious wit in Jonathan Dove's *Stargazer* but no less ingenious with unashamed references to Holst and harmonic language that seems firmly rooted in these islands, despite its interstellar subject matter. The sound produces some lovely cosmic effects and Peter Moore's playing is unsurprisingly fabulous. With a straight-through-the-middle purity to his sound, he conjures expansive musical landscapes, serving Dove's ideas with panache. This language is explored further with Matthew Aucoin's *Eurydice Suite* and *Heath*. Like many contemporary composers, Aucoin embraces the potential of percussion timbres using crotales, timpani and even castanets to conjure sounds ranging from subaqueous to gladiatorial.

Flair on the rest of the selection is effortlessly served up by the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, who appear to be completely comfortable with the demands of each of the composers, and Timothy Redmond's incisive direction.

If there are any flaws to the project it is that the demands on the listener are high; at 81 minutes long the recording requires a lengthy connection with the audience who may be better served by one less piece on the album. *Anne Templer*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

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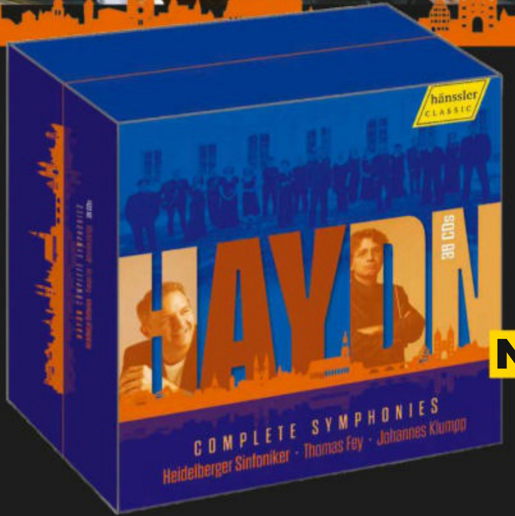
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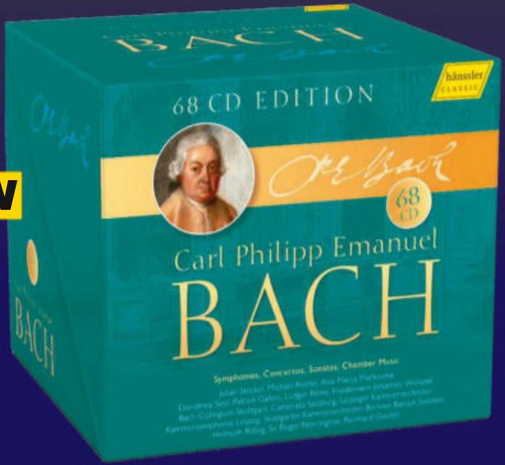
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Opera & Stage

OPERA CHOICE

Ravishing Baroque treasures unearthed

Berta Joncus applauds this collection of rare arias from soprano Roberta Mameli

The Ghosts of Hamlet *– Lost Arias from Italian Baroque Operas*

Arias by Carcani, Handel et al
Roberta Mameli (soprano); Le Concert de l'Hostel Dieu/ Franck-Emmanuel Comte
Arcana A574 68:04 mins

Stonking performances and brilliant programming unite in this solo album. Hamlet – not Shakespeare's character, but the prince of the 12th-century history of Denmark, *Gesta Danorum* – became, in the 18th century, the hero of a libretto by Apostolo Zeno. This recording brings together numbers from various settings of Zeno's *Ambleto*. Roberta Mameli's singing burns with passion and virtuosity, aided by the inspired direction of Franck-Emmanuel Comte.

Mameli conjures fully realised dramatic characters, some of whose best music is by Francesco Gasparini. 'Stelle, voi che de' regnanti' (1705) is a high point, and illustrative of Mameli's powers: over lilting triple meter, she weaves in and out of the cello line, showing herself vulnerable to its motions; on the repeat of this music, however, she starts on a *pianissimo* high B natural and then buries the rest of the melody under cascading diminutions. It's ravishing. The project's one repertoire piece, a resetting of 'Tu ben degno sei dell'allor' from Handel's *Agrippina*, transforms this usually sugary praise song into a jarring accusation.

Comte and Le Concert de l'Hostel Dieu are pure joy. Their exchange of ideas gives this performance its febrile energy. Further enriching the recording, Comte inserts rare sinfonia that, aesthetically, could have worked as overtures to these lost Hamlets. It's next-level programming: the individual tracks are not only musically contrasting dramatic cousins, but clearly the result of an active dialogue with forgotten past music of great subtlety.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Comte and Le Concert de l'Hostel Dieu are pure joy

A glowing talent: soprano Roberta Mameli's performance is powerfully dramatic

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Ponchielli

I Lituani
Jūratė Švedaitė-Waller, Kristian Benedikt et al; Lithuanian National Symphony Orchestra; Kaunas State Choir/Modestas Pitrėnas
Accentus ACC80642 168:07 mins (3CD)

It was Ponchielli's misfortune to be caught between Verdi and the *Verismo* composers who dominated late- 19th-century Italian opera. Premiered at La Scala in 1875 and revived by Toscanini nearly 30 years later *I Lituani* (The Lithuanians) was then abandoned.

However, it appears that Ponchielli's reliably tuneful Italian Grand Opera, suffused with Nationalist yearnings, has always affected the Lithuanians themselves. The appeal of a Lithuanian patriot, Walter, overturning the brutal rule of the Teutonic Knights in the Middle Ages by disguising himself as Corrado, their Grand Master, means much to a nation successively occupied by Stalin, Hitler and then the Soviet Union. And Ghislanzoni's libretto, carved from a poem by the Lithuanian nationalist Adam Mickiewicz, is suitably rousing.

Modestas Pitrėnas conducts a cast of home-grown singers not all of whom rise to the challenge. Kristian Benedikt's Walter/Corrado is scarcely the baritonal tenor who Ponchielli imagined in the role. The voice is easily strained and there is an occasional tendency to wander off pitch, yet he does the hero's death with some style, helped by the composer at his most melodic.

Jūratė Švedaitė-Waller as his wife Aldona is very much an Eastern European soprano with a burry tone and a tendency to scoop from under the note. As the hero's confidant Albano, Tadas Girininkas is a light bass when you might hope for heft in the lower register. As for the Villain Vitoldo (Arūnas Malikėnas) the part scarcely exists!

As you expect from a Baltic State where singing is freedom, the chorus, the Kaunas State Choir admirably drilled by Petras Bingelis, are magnificent whether Germans, Lithuanians or singing slaves at a feast in the ballet. *Christopher Cook*

PERFORMANCE ★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Stravinsky

Le Rossignol
Sabine Devieilhe (soprano), Cyrille Dubois (tenor) et al; Les Siècles/ François-Xavier Roth
Erato 5419762407 43:44 mins

There was a six-year-gap between the composition of the first act of Stravinsky's miniature Chinese opera and the remainder of the piece.

The first act was composed in Moscow in 1908 (clear influences include Stravinsky's teacher, Rimsky-Korsakov, and Debussy); then, swept up into the busy world of Diaghilev's *Ballet Russes*, Stravinsky returned to write the second and third acts in 1913-14, following the experience of *The Firebird*, *Petrushka* and *The Rite of Spring*.

A certain stylistic discrepancy between the music from the two periods need not bother listeners: the brief narrative takes a darker turn later, when the Chinese Emperor initially enchanted by the singing of the Nightingale falls instead for the less spontaneous lyricism of a mechanical substitute. When he then falls mortally sick, he is saved by the singing of the real, returning nightingale.

Stravinsky originally set a Russian text, and it was in that language that the piece made its debut, at the Paris Opéra on 26 May 1914; but it is often performed instead in a French translation that finds close to ideal vocal interpreters in a Francophone cast led here by Sabine Devieilhe's pristine Nightingale, Cyrille Dubois's haunting Fisherman, Chantal Santon Jeffery's focused Cook, Laurent Naouri's lively Chamberlain, Victor Sicard's grand Bonze, Lucile Richardot's firm Death and Jean-Sébastien Bou's solid Emperor of China.

Similarly, the period forces of François-Xavier Roth's Les Siècles bring to the piece a gentle colouristic charm, an apt tonal tenderness and gentle luminosity, offering a more individual sound than would a modern orchestra. *George Hall*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Pristine songbird: soprano Sabine Devieilhe stands out as Stravinsky's Nightingale in *Le Rossignol*

Tippett

New Year

Rhian Lois, Ross Ramgobin, Susan Bickley; BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra/Martyn Brabbins
NMC NMCD291 112:34 mins (2CD)

Tippett biographer Oliver Soden describes *New Year* as an important link in the British operatic chain that connects Britten and Mark-Anthony Turnage. In this first commercial recording of the 1989 work, the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, Martyn Brabbins and a slew of star vocalists provide significant evidence to support Soden's observation. The distinctive palette, girded by glockenspiel and furnished by flute, hints at *Curlew River*; the tutti chorus evokes *Peter Grimes*. Meanwhile, genre-melding guitar riffs foreshadow the ensemble used in *Anna Nicole*. But the libretto is all Tippett: a bizarre collision of Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*, *Doctor Who* and the utopian worlds of John Wyndham. Set in a conflicted multicultural society – a symbol of Thatcher's Britain, although the premiere took place in Houston before the opera came to Glyndebourne – a spaceship arrives containing one, er, Merlin (baritone Roland Wood) and a pilot called Pelegrin (tenor Robert Murray), who ultimately offers JoAnn (soprano Rhian Lois) a choice between the blissful fountain of forgetting or the bitter lake of remembering. (She chooses the latter.) Composer-written librettos are ubiquitous in the fantasy genre (most famously, Wagner) but this one is a good advert for commissioning a professional writer. Still, the witty patchwork references – including 'Auld Lang Syne', to tie with the title's setting – allow for interesting, fragmented musical exploration (something also heard in Turnage), and the tautness of the score more than makes up for the loose weave of the narrative. Fostered teenager Donny's identity crisis is represented by syncopated lines and a guitar part influenced by contemporary ska. Baritone Ross Ramgobin handles the purposeful pastiche well; as the Presenter, Alan Oke's tenor is the glue that holds everything together. *Claire Jackson*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Weldon

The Judgment of Paris

Helen Charlston, Kitty Whately et al; Cambridge Handel Opera; Academy of Ancient Music/Julian Perkins
AAM AAM046 75:32 mins

JOHN WELDON
THE JUDGMENT OF PARIS

Director Julian Perkins brings out the brilliance of John Weldon's *The Judgment of Paris* (1701) in this world-premiere recording. The opera won Weldon a competition, whose judges were surely charmed by its whimsical character sketches: the emasculating Juno who commands mannish instruments, edgy rhythms and swooping melismas, the martial Pallas Athene who is defined by ringing horns, stately meters and noble melodies. The men are subtly mocked, as for instance when the tonal centre of the decision-torn Paris fails to settle, or Mercury conveys his dicta in over-the-top diminutions.

Venus gets the most music – soft instruments, seductive tunes, sexy blends – and soprano Anna Dennis seems optimally cast in the role. Her easy simplicity, rich yet clear core and lusciously cooing top notes make the judgement in her favour seem inevitable. Perkins sets up striking contrasts between Dennis and the two mezzo-sopranos. Helen Charlston (Juno) swaggers and swells, darkening her timbres and flexing her vocal muscle, while the driving delivery of Kitty Whately (Pallas Athene) overpowers the *obbligato* trumpets in a battle for melodic supremacy. Baritone Jonathan Brown (Paris) excels in his part's florid *arioso*, gorgeously havering and wavering, and hesitating at just the right moments. Mercury's assurance registers in tenor Thomas Walker's suave line and bold articulation.

Perkins gets enormous buy-in from his band, made up of top Early Music instrumentalists. The drama of their drunken slides, caressing soft lines and rollicking compound rhythms at times wittily exceeds that of vocal parts. The power and precision of the chorus conveys the shock of Weldon's textural contrasts. But the palm must go to Perkins himself, whose conducting brings out the finest details of Weldon's beautiful, tongue-in-cheek and previously unrecorded score. *Berta Joncus*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

GIANNI RIZZOTTI, ANNA DABROWSKA

Choral & Song

CHORAL & SONG CHOICE

SUCH STUFF AS DREAMS ARE MADE ON
THE KING'S SINGERS

A dreamy song selection to mark the end of an era

The King's Singers are impeccable in a final set with bass Jonathan Howard, says ***Ashutosh Khandekar***

One last sing-along: Jonathan Howard (far right) left the King's Singers in 2024

Such Stuff As Dreams Are Made On

Works by Brahms, Debussy, Halfvén, Ravel, Schubert, Vaughan Williams et al
The King's Singers et al
Signum Classics SIGCD887 63:27 mins

This is the last recording The King's Singers made before the departure of bass Jonathan Howard. It bears all the familiar hallmarks of a well-loved vocal team that has honed its style over half a century: every line of polyphony is given its proper weight, every word of text is cherished, consonants impeccably placed and vowels homogenous throughout the texture. The overall impression is of a single organism, comfortable in its skin, moving and breathing as one.

The programme features music that spans national traditions drawn from all over Europe in four languages. Arrangements of songs by Schubert, Brahms and the Mendelssohn siblings, by turns rousing and wistful, are juxtaposed with settings of English poetry by Elgar and Vaughan Williams that seem to capture the shifting uncertainties of life in a time of war. French *chansons* by Debussy, Saint-Saëns and Ravel are threaded through the collection, bringing ravishing Gallic light and colour to the mix. Meanwhile, little-known works by the 'Swedish Vaughan Williams', Hugo Halfvén, appear as curiosities and revelations.

The addition of two female voices in Vaughan Williams's well-known settings of songs from Shakespeare is a first for the group, but sopranos Grace Davidson and Victoria Meteyard have assimilated the style completely, blending seamlessly into the ravishing King's sound.

> Anyone who wants to hear *a cappella* singing at its best will not be disappointed

This recording is pervaded by a poignant sense of the end of an era, and anyone who wants to hear unrivalled *a cappella* singing at its serious best will not be disappointed.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

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Britten • Rainier

Britten: Canticles I-V;
Rainier: Cycle for Declamation
James Way (tenor), Lotte Betts-Dean (mezzo-soprano), Hugh Cutting (countertenor), Ross Ramgobin (baritone), Natalie Burch (piano) Annemarie Federle (horn), Alis Huws (harp),
Delphian DCD34340 67:50 mins

Britten's *Canticles* were written for his partner, the English tenor Peter Pears, and Pears's recording of them remains a reference point five decades after it was completed. It is, of course, not the only way to sing these pieces, as this fine new album demonstrates. In 'Canticle I' the English tenor James Way is generally fierier than Pears, if a little less punctilious in voicing the melismas Britten typically writes into the vocal part. Way and pianist Natalie Burch distil a palpable warmth and sensuality in the becalmed concluding stanza, compared to the more understated Pears-Britten recording.

Mezzo-soprano Lotte Betts-Dean joins Way in 'Canticle II: Abraham and Isaac', her convincingly boyish timbre achieved without any loss of textual nuance. Way, Burch and horn player Annemarie Federle fully embrace the impassioned vision of 'Canticle III: Still falls the rain', again not flinching from the raw emotional content of Britten's music. The recorded sound, though immediate in impact, is somewhat resonant, casting a blowsy post-echo when voice and horn are in full throttle. This also to some extent blurs the contours of 'Canticle V: The Death of Saint Narcissus', where Britten's delicate writing for the harp is partly clouded over.

The coupling is Priaulx Rainier's seldom heard *Cycle for Declamation*, three movements for unaccompanied tenor written especially for Pears in 1954. Way's supple vocalism and sensitive phrasing make poetry from pieces which can seem austere, and whet one's appetite for more of Priaulx Rainier's music.

Interpretively speaking, this is a fresh and nourishing recital.
Terry Blain

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Elgar

The Dream of Gerontius

Christine Rice, John Findon, Helsinki Music Centre Choir et al; Finnish Radio Symphony/Nicholas Collon
Ondine ODE 1451-2D 91:20 mins (2CD)

ELGAR
The Dream of Gerontius
NICHOLAS COLLON

Whoever originally (and fatuously) suggested that English music didn't 'travel' hadn't reckoned with Nicholas Collon. His orchestra is Finnish, the choirs unite Helsinki and Cambridge, while the solo trio is British. This recording moreover preserves a concert given in Helsinki last year where, by all accounts, *Gerontius* was something of a revelation to the Finns.

Little wonder. Famous for visceral off-copy performances with his Aurora Orchestra (see feature, p44), there's nothing choral-society-stodgy about Collon's approach. (And yes, there are marvellous choral society performances too!). At times he inculcates an operatic immediacy, and seldom have the orchestral textures sounded so Wagnerian – as if Elgar had recently been leafing through the pages of *Parsifal*. Indeed the orchestra and chorus are the real stars as Collon encourages a vibrantly fresh, well projected choral sound matched by a sumptuously sonorous orchestral layering. Propelled by incisive lower strings there's an unexpected urgency to the 'Be merciful' chorus; the climactic outburst of 'Praise to the Holiest' thrills; and the end of Part 1 is suffused with tender valediction.

Occasionally the pacing falters a little. In the Prelude the leitmotifs are outlined a touch self-consciously impeding the flow; but Collon has a sure ear for the minutiae that illuminate – a snippet of oboe interaction here, a snatch of countermelody there. John Findon stepped in for an indisposed Allan Clayton late in the day which perhaps explains a hint of 'work in progress' in places, and Janet Baker's Angel for the Barbirolli Hallé recording casts a long shadow that Christine Rice can't quite shrug off. But there's plenty to reward any Elgarian eager to re-encounter a masterpiece refreshed and considered anew. *Paul Riley*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

MARSHALL LIGHT, OLWEN HOLLAND

Singing strings: Piatti Quartet bring a luminous energy to songs by Gabriel Fauré

Fauré

La bonne chanson; Songs

Nicky Spence (tenor), Julius Drake (piano); Piatti Quartet
Hyperion CDA68450 55:03 mins

Fauré La bonne chanson

This is not the usual Fauré. It is not merely that *La bonne chanson* is heard here in the rare version where string quintet joins and transfigures the intertwining of voice and piano. The cycle's nine songs form an irrepressible exclamation of love bursting through the composer's customary nonchalance. Saint-Saëns thought Fauré 'completely mad', but it is easy to see why Proust declared 'I adore it', especially in this radiantly ardent performance from Nicky Spence. The Piatti Quartet, supplemented by Tim Gibbs on double-bass, bring a luminous energy, even in the relatively restrained textures of the opening 'Une Sainte en son auréole'. The ebb and flow of textures with pianist Julius Drake in 'La lune blanche' is sublimely seamless, the perfect foil for Spence's hushed wonder, while the fervent excitement of 'J'ai Presque peur, en vérité' is irresistible.

An attractive selection of generally earlier songs follows. In 'Le secret', Spence's sustained control allied to Drake's unfussy calm is mesmerising, while 'En sourdine' has a deceptively easy-going warmth. The relatively resonant acoustic flattens their changes of mood in 'Mandoline', but it also enables the menacingly dark undercurrents they find in 'Automne' and their immediacy in the short early cycle *Poème d'un jour.* This is Fauré for the concert hall rather than the drawing room, big-hearted, yet with no lack of nuance. Admittedly, *La bonne chanson* would work better as the recital's culmination, the strings beguilingly opening out the textures. Whatever the order, though, this is thoroughly engaging Fauré. *Christopher Dingle*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Gavin Higgins

The Faerie Bride; Horn Concerto*^; Air and Flourishes*

*Ben Goldscheider (horn), Roderick Williams (baritone) et al; Three Choirs Festival Chorus; BBC National Orchestra of Wales/^Jaime Martín, Martyn Brabbins
Lyrita SRCD440 84:02 mins

Gavin Higgins
Horn Concerto
Fanfare, Air and Flourishes

BBC NOW composer-in-association Gavin Higgins (b1983) combines dramatic flair with superb orchestral skill and emotional intelligence. All are present here, the forces honed to Ben Goldscheider's solo horn in the characterful *Fanfare, Air and Flourishes* (2021). But it's the latter attribute that perhaps most underpins the success of the orchestral works. Both explore liminal spaces from personal experience and with sensitivity to lived reality while thrilling in musical and imaginative terms.

The Horn Concerto (2023) draws on Higgins's upbringing as a Forest of Dean brass bander who turned – albeit ambivalently – to the French horn before becoming a composer. His love of the instrument shines in a paean that at once celebrates and signals environmental threats to those magical, formative woodlands. Otherworldly shades of Wagner, hunting horns and much else abound in rich, kaleidoscopic textures as the composer emerges brilliantly Pan-like alongside his soloist; Goldscheider arising from and melting into concertante orchestra horns and wider ensemble with agility and stamina.

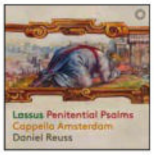
With echoes of Britten, the borders of human willingness to embrace otherness are explored in *The Faerie Bride* (2021, librettist Francesca Simon). A cantata retelling of the Welsh legend of the Lady of the Lake, it's as psychologically true as it is vividly fantastical and expressively direct. Soloists Roderick Williams and Marta Fontanals-Simmons are supplely heartbreaking as the human-faerie couple, doomed by a community's refusal to countenance difference. Joined here by the Three Choirs Festival Chorus, BBC NOW are excellent throughout under respective live-concert conductors Martyn Brabbins and Jaime Martín. *Steph Power*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Lassus

Penitential Psalms

Cappella Amsterdam/Daniel Reuss
Pentatone PTC 5187 066 123:13 mins (2CD)



There are seven psalms (Nos 6, 31, 38, 51, 102, 130 and 143 in the Protestant bible) that especially concentrate on the sins of the psalmist and his entreaties to God for forgiveness. The early church

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Superb expression: tenor Ian Bostridge is perfectly matched in Schumann songs

MARCO BORGGREVE

fathers linked these 'penitential' psalms to the seven deadly sins, though evidence for those links in the texts is slim, and the potential for unremitting mournfulness is not avoided in some recordings.

The Cappella Amsterdam is different. It is a mixed choir of 15 voices which work together splendidly, even if Lassus rarely uses the different ranges to enhance the meaning of the text. For example, the sombre first verse of the sixth psalm ('Out of the depths I cry to thee') is airily announced by bright, enchanting sopranos. Elsewhere the director Daniel Reuss persuades the choir to add some judicious contrasts of its own as in the quiet atmospheric rendering of the fifth psalm, verse four ('my days have vanished ... and my bones withered'), or the skittishness at the mention of the horse and mule (second psalm, verse nine). The great challenge in these pieces is to keep a sense of direction. Lassus uses harmony to provide windows of colour rather than structure, and so his basses move around in a slightly angular manner. The lower voices negotiate these superbly as in psalm four verse one ('Have mercy on me O God'), where the bass voice anchors the harmonies precisely and with a rich resonance. An insightful, rewarding and musical recording.

Anthony Pryer

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

John Rutter

Missa Brevis; Celebration*; plus works by Kerry Andrew, Kerensa Briggs, Sarah MacDonald, James MacMillan, Cecilia McDowall, Becky McGlade, Philip Moore, Annabel Rooney, Judith Weir et al

*Benjamin Morris (organ); The Choir of York Minster/Robert Sharpe

Regent REGCD576 80:19 mins

This snapshot of the busy musical life of York Minster brings together contemporary composers and influential figures from the past quarter of a century who have contributed to the choral traditions of one of the Anglican church's most ancient and important centres of worship.

John Rutter's *Missa Brevis*, the opening work, seems modest in its ambitions, a characteristic amalgam of highly singable, sonorous vocal lines, richly harmonised and wittily syncopated. The work is a genial addition to Rutter's significant contribution to the short mass repertoire, written in memory of Richard Shephard, the unassuming though highly effective headmaster of York Minster School. *Celebration*, Rutter's substantial organ piece that ends the recording, pays tribute to the more exuberant facets of Shephard, who was a distinguished composer in his own right, as well as showcasing the grandeur of the Minster's recently restored organ.

Commissions by familiar names such as James MacMillan, Judith Weir, Cecilia McDowall and Philip Moore are testament to the Minster's influence in shaping today's burgeoning choral scene across Britain.

Although there are many new works in this collection and female composers are strongly represented, the choral writing speaks of a reassuring continuity and tradition in the Anglican liturgy. Attractive vignettes by Sarah MacDonald and Elizabeth and Thomas Coxhead trace a line from the great Edwardian traditions of English church music through Britten and Howells to the present day. More innovative techniques can be heard in Kerry Andrew's free-form improvisation and the folkloric decorations in James MacMillan's *Short Service*.

Conductor Robert Sharpe has been director of music at York through much of the period from which this music dates, and his mixed-gender choir sounds confident and vigorous in the Minster's extravagant acoustic, full of lively resonance in this recording.

Ashutosh Khandekar

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Schumann

5 Lieder, Op. 40; Liederkreis, Op. 39; Gedichte von Justinus Kerner, Op. 35; 2 Lieder from Lieder-Album für die Jungend, Op. 79 (Twilight)

Ian Bostridge (tenor), Saskia Giorgini (piano)

Pentatone PTC 5187 162 73:26 mins

Twilight Schumann Songs
Ian Bostridge Saskia Giorgini

Twilight, Ian Bostridge's new set of Schumann lieder belongs to that time when day surrenders to night and the Romantic sleep of reason brings forth monsters.

These settings of poems by von Chamisso, Eichendorff and Justinus Kerner all date from 1840, Schumann's miraculous year of song, when his passion for Clara Wieck produced an unequalled lyric outpouring.

Yet if Clara's presence haunts these songs, so do darker fears, couched in classic Romantic anxieties about the fading of the light, dark woods, wandering alone loveless and the death that is winter.

It's a repertoire that is perfectly matched to Bostridge's gifts. Never a conventional lyric tenor he remains in his maturity a superbly expressive singer. The rasping of the crow looking through a window at a baby in 'Muttertraum', the rising excitement in 'Mondnacht' or the almost whispered opening of 'Alte Laute' could not be bettered. Every word matters as he turns the shortest lyric into a story of the heart. In Kerner's 'Auf das Trinkglas eines verstorbenen Freundes', a glass from which a friend once drank recalls a lost friendship. When he slips into the lower register in Eichendorff's 'Auf einer Burg' you feel you've been caught eavesdropping on intimate secrets.

Saskia Giorgini is a sturdy companion on this dark journey. Sometimes you might wish for a softer touch, but her gift for picture painting is admirable and there is an ambivalence about her playing of the postludes that matches our sense of Schumann as a divided spirit.

Christopher Cook

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

BRIEF NOTES

Joanna Marsh A Plastic Theatre and Other Choral Works

Jennifer Johnston (mezzo); I Fagiolini/Robert Hollingworth; The Lyons Mouth; Stile Antico ; Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra et al

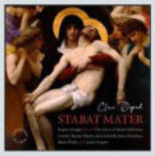
Signum Classics SIGCD929 67:15 mins

Scored for mezzo soloist, chorus and orchestra, this album's five-movement title work explores the various joys and horrors of plastic in a surprisingly powerful and haunting way. It is prefaced by the exceptional choral prowess of I Fagiolini and others in *a cappella* songs that range from sublime (*Now I Lay*) to mildly irritating (*Geocentric*). *Jeremy Pound* ★★★★

Clive Osgood Stabat Mater

London Mozart Players; The Choir of Royal Holloway/Rupert Gough et al

Convivium CR104. 33:15 mins

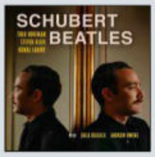


From the spine-tingling opening string refrain, you know you're in for something special. Clive Osgood's 2009 take on Mary's grief at Christ's crucifixion is suitably sobering and intense when it needs to be, but there's a beauty, dynamism and freshness which makes this really very appealing. Gorgeous performances, too. *Michael Beek* ★★★★★

Schubert/Beatles Works by Schubert, Lennon/McCartney

Theo Hoffman (baritone), Julia Bullock (soprano) et al

NYFOS Records 1242851. 56:33 mins



This ingenious programme marries songs by Schubert and The Beatles, revealing unexpected similarities: as pianist Steven Blier points out, 'Both explore young adulthood with literacy and depth.' When freed of their rock'n'roll packaging, songs like 'Yesterday' and 'She's Leaving Home' are every bit as soulful as 'Im Frühling' and 'Du bist die Ruh', and in these delightful arrangements, they're revealed anew. *Charlotte Smith* ★★★★

Habanera – *Music for Eight Cellos and Voice*

Works by De Falla, Montsalvatge, Villa-Lobos et al

Ana Beard Fernández (soprano), Roderick Williams (baritone), Iain Hall (recorder); The Endellion Cellists/William Vann

SOMM SOMMCD 0699 61:51 mins

You can't have too many cellos... or can you? Arranging music for eight lower instruments is a real art and requires deft handling of range and timbre for the overall effect not to become clogged. Adding a soprano, however, is an excellent foil to the lower lines, as is brilliantly exemplified in Villa-Lobos's ever popular *Bachianas Brasileiras* No. 5. Ana Beard Fernández shines throughout with her clear, warm but light voice that eloquently weaves over the harmonies and is suitably acrobatic in the second movement 'Danca', performed here with impressively taut ensemble. The arrangements by Roderick Williams of De Falla's *Siete Canciones Populares Españolas* and Montsalvatge's *Cinco Canciones Negras* are excellent, with well-spaced tessitura, and good use of pizzicato accompanying bowed lines to obviate the texture ever sounding too heavy. Dynamics are also carefully etched, although achieving fast enough pizzicatos proves a bit challenging in De Falla's 'Polo'. Nevertheless, Fernández is absolutely at one with the idiom, delivering brilliantly characterised cameos.

Achieving completely pristine ensemble in the pizzicato passages proves tricky once again in the opening of Henri du Bailly's 'yo soy la locura' and Anon's 'So el encina'. Roderick Williams appears in both these songs, though in the latter, his heavier voice works less persuasively with the lighter quality of Fernández.

Ravel's wordless *Habanera* is a sultry affair, leaner cello lines allowing Fernández to shimmer and cascade flexibly down the cadenzas. Rachmaninov's 'Vocalise', on the other hand, is not so persuasive. The original piano part is very thick and chromatic, and in this arrangement the more complex cello lines tend to crowd out the sumptuous solo voice. Darker Russian hues and thicker textures also define Shostakovich's nod to Spain in 'Proshchaj Granada!' where the lower chords offer somewhat turgid competition to the baritone line. *Jo Talbot*

PERFORMANCE ★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Lieder

Works by Brahms, Schubert, Schumann et al

Fatma Said (soprano)

Warner Classics 2173245983 64:26 mins

While Fatma Said's earlier albums featured unusual repertoire, here she assembles a number of standard 'hits'. But listeners who fear a trudge through long-flattened terrain need not worry. This approach reveals new features in the landscape.

Characteristically, Said enlists numerous fine collaborators, from Sabine Meyer on clarinet to baritone Huw Montague Rendall, as well as a harpist, a string quartet, a male voice choir and no less than three collaborative pianists. Said's appealing essay contextualises her choices, referencing her background, commitment to friendship and belief in a text-led interpretation. Much thought has gone into the sequence of songs, which spans many moods, often connected by topics, textures and keys. Not everything works; Brahms's very slight *Ophelia-Lieder* feel over-egged in a string quartet arrangement, though the barely-there song 'Sie trugen ihn' does work. The harp arrangements of his solo songs lend them a delicate otherworldliness.

Said's voice is recorded to maximise intimacy of sound. She takes risks with colours, breaths and keys, enabling listeners to encounter her full vocal and expressive range. For instance, Schubert's sinister 'Der Zwerg' reveals a palette of darker colours. Schubert's 'Ständchen' (with choir) is light-hearted and humorous; 'Auf dem Wasser zu singen' elicits sparkling sounds from Malcolm Martineau. Huw Montague Rendall has a terrific voice but – sadly – is pushed somewhat into the background by the recorded balance, except in isolated moments.

The closing five songs, beautifully accompanied by Joseph Middleton, bring the focus back to piano-accompanied voice. Said ends with Robert Schumann's duet 'In der Nacht', which may be one of the loveliest things the composer ever crafted, its tender intimacy summarising the album's expressive aims overall. *Natasha Loges*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Hits heard afresh: soprano Fatma Said curates a thoughtful album

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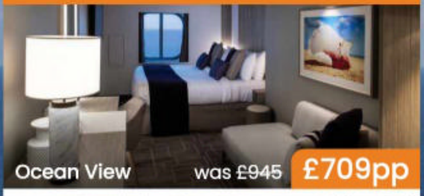

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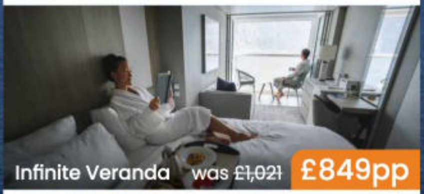

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CHAMBER CHOICE

CHANDOS
Górecki
COMPLETE WORKS FOR STRING QUARTET
Silesian Quartet

An outstanding survey of Górecki's string quartets

The Silesian Quartet deliver an incisive performance of the composer's chamber works, says *John Allison*

The perfect blend: Silesian Quartet navigate Górecki's musical landscapes with aplomb

Górecki

Complete Works for String Quartet
Silesian Quartet
Chandos CHAN20383(2) 124:35 mins (2CD)

The belated success of Górecki's Third Symphony was possibly more of a curse than a blessing. Dawn Upshaw's 1992 recording suddenly skewed perceptions not only of the 1975 'Symphony of Sorrowful Songs' but indeed of Górecki's wider output. Although spirituality was always a part of Górecki's make-up, so was a strong vein of Polish intellectualism. He began as a tough avant-gardist, as any complete survey of his music reveals.

When it comes to his works for string quartet, that survey begins about halfway through his career – dating from 1988, the String Quartet No. 1 predates the composer's worldwide fame. 'Already it is Dusk' owes something to Bartókian tradition in its processing of folk elements from Górecki's beloved Tatra mountains, while the prayer of its title, taken from a Polish renaissance motet, provides the other main strand. They are perfectly blended by the Silesian Quartet, Górecki interpreters of long standing who play with a mixture of stillness and attack.

The three numbered quartets, unquestionably masterpieces, are predominately slow yet very different. The Beethovenian title of No. 2, 'Quasi una fantasia', is enigmatic but there are quotes from Bach and Bernstein. It receives an incisive performance, and there is even more searing intensity in No. 3, '...songs are sung', a work lasting over 50 minutes and consisting of four slow movements ranged around a brief central *scherzo*, with some sonorities found nowhere else in the quartet literature. The premiere recording of the *Five Kurpian Songs*, in the composer's own transcriptions of his unaccompanied choruses, brings this outstanding release to a haunting close.

> The Silesian Quartet play with a mixture of stillness and attack

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

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Beethoven

String Quartets Nos 1-6 (The Early Quartets)
Calidore Quartet
Signum Classics SIGCD883
156:29 mins (3CD)

CALIDORE STRING QUARTET
BEETHOVEN

The Calidore Quartet's recording of Beethoven's late string quartets won BBC Music Magazine's Chamber Music Award in 2024, and in my original review I praised the remarkable technical accomplishment of their playing. The same quality holds good for their new album of the composer's first half-dozen quartets, Op. 18. These works may be more classically conceived, but they're by no means easy to play. The Calidore Quartet manage such moments as the intricate *pianissimo* passage at the centre of the opening movement in the second quartet to perfection, and they're no less delicate and precise in the transparent *staccato* second movement of the C minor Quartet, Op. 18 No. 4. Perhaps they don't quite penetrate to the heart of the music in the slow movement of the First Quartet – a tragic piece inspired by the scene in the vault from *Romeo and Juliet*. Beethoven wanted it played with both affection and passion (this is one of the comparatively rare occasions on which he invoked the word *appassionato*), and the way he notates the repeated-note accompaniment in the three lower voices suggests he was after a throbbing effect, to lend the music greater warmth and intensity than it has in the Calidore's more detached interpretation.

Some 20 years after he composed these pieces Beethoven compiled a list of metronome markings for them. Many of them are improbably fast, and while the Calidore players don't necessarily take them literally they do adopt some hair-raisingly quick tempos. But with playing of this calibre the results are always exhilarating. *Misha Donat*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Christopher Cerrone

Don't Look Down etc
Sandbox Percussion
Pentatone PTC 5187 403 (digital)
52:03 mins

Cerrone Don't Look Down
Sandbox Percussion

Among the multifaceted role of percussion in the current musical diaspora, perhaps one of its most important is its ability to simultaneously stretch our sonic soundworlds, yet remain accessible. Sandbox Percussion clearly manifests that on this album of works by Christopher Cerrone. Composed during the pandemic, the album stretches and challenges the listeners' ears introducing us to homemade instruments, such as metal bars and wooden slats. There is joy in some of the more conventional percussion sounds, such as bowed vibraphone, scraped gongs, marimba and crotales. At times, Cerrone likes to separate the metal and wooden instruments and at others he and the performers are wildly experimental – combining these, prepared piano and blown wine bottles. Of course there are great grooves, but there is also a containment with these performances, and at times the worlds are serenely beautiful. Despite its title, 'A Natural History of Vacant Lots' draws the listener into a spiritual, almost prayerful zone reminiscent of prayer bowls and church bells. In contrast, 'Interlude 1 - Wood' from *Goldbeater's Skin* has an astonishing whisk across the ears, conjuring up great stick work and pecking wooden sounds, segueing beautifully into the melodic shape of 'In My Dream.'

Despite the occasional desire for more chorister like qualities in the voice, the dreamscape of this album draws together many of the threads of the 21st-century human spirit; resilience, adaptability, despair and optimism. This vision is well worth our full immersion. *Anne Templer*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

C Schumann • R Schumann

Works for Clarinet and Piano
Julian Bliss (clarinet),
James Baillieu (piano)
Signum Classics SIGCD888 56:26 mins

CLARA & ROBERT
SCHUMANN
BLISS
BAILLIEU

Most of the music recorded here wasn't actually written for clarinet. Does that matter? In an age when many middle-class people got to know music by playing it at home, arrangements for a variety of combinations were common, and Schumann made several himself. And when they're made as sensitively as here (most are by Julian Bliss), why complain? The song from *Minnespiel* ('Mein schöner Stern!') sounds so beguiling, so exquisitely vocal, that Schumann himself might have preferred it to a less than top-notch singer. I'm not sure I'd chose this *Adagio and Allegro* over the horn or cello versions, but generally the selection is well made and well ordered. You can listen to it in one go, as a recital, and the interest doesn't flag. If you do, and you don't know the music, ignore the booklet and see if you can guess which is Robert and which is Clara Schumann. You may be able to pick out when Robert's on absolutely top form, weaving his uniquely fragile, strangely lateral kind of magic spell, but otherwise even the knowing might fail the test. I did, once – it was Clara's setting of Rückert's 'Liebst du um Schönheit' that caught me out. What this album also gives us is a taste of what domestic music-making might have been like in the Schumanns' own home. Bliss and James Baillieu work very well indeed together, Baillieu discreet when needed, but so much more than just an accompanist. The whole thing is agreeably recorded too: we're with the Schumanns in a kind of ideal drawing room, comfortable but with a fine acoustic, and perhaps a glass of chilled Mosel. *Stephen Johnson*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Smetana

String Quartets; The Bartered Bride – Dance of Comedians (Arr. String Quartet)
Zemlinsky Quartet
Evil Penguin EPRC 0069 53:17 mins

In his operas and the orchestral symphonic poems of *Má Vlast* Smetana was fulfilling his duty to his nation in the most public of forums. When it came to chamber music, he was concerned entirely with his own, very personal struggles. Both his string quartets are unashamedly autobiographical, most explicitly in the first, and yet they deliver their enormous emotional impact with almost classical precision. Balancing these two competing impulses is no easy task, but the Zemlinsky Quartet join a distinguished array of ensembles, many of them Czech, in providing performances in which a clear sense of formal outline is always at the service of the intense dramatic narrative at the heart of this extraordinary music.

Their interpretation of the opening movement of the First Quartet is a near ideal mix of determination and passion in realising the underlying narrative. The *polka* second movement has a fine swagger, although some may find the central section a little on the precious side. The operatic qualities of the finale, with the almost *Bartered Bride*-like bustle of the opening, are brilliantly captured as is the profound sense of shock and desolation in the tragic close.

The players are equally at home in the more Expressionist world of the Second Quartet. The episodic first movement makes perfect sense, and they give a haunting account of the bittersweet *polka* that follows. While not flawless, these well-recorded performances communicate an authentic feeling for the emotional turmoil Smetana felt as he composed these uniquely disturbing works. *Jan Smaczny*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Sonic exploration: Sandbox Percussion have fun in Cerrone

NOAH STERN WEBER

Tchaikovsky

String Quartet No. 3 in E flat minor; The Seasons
Dudok Quartet Amsterdam
Rubicon RCD1124 60:30 mins

TCHAIKOVSKY
DUDOKQUARTET

In the booklet notes to the second volume of their Tchaikovsky cycle, the Dudok Quartet place great emphasis on using gut strings for repertoire written before the 20th century. Far from being some kind of gimmick which differentiates their approach from other performers who opt for the much sleeker and more powerful sound that can be generated from modern steel strings, the players argue that their preference provides untold benefits in enhancing the impact of the music.

In the case of Tchaikovsky whose quartet writing, tends to invoke a quasi-orchestral texture, the advantages of using gut strings are immediately apparent throughout this recital, especially in the exceptionally fine performance of the Third Quartet. Whereas some frantically busy passages in the outer movements can often sound cluttered and heavy-handed, the Dudoks bring clarity and light to the process, almost as if they are restoring the original vivid colours of an old master painting. Even more startling is the sound picture that emerges from the funereal slow movement in which Tchaikovsky's inspired use of mutes creates a particularly chilling effect on gut strings.

Of course, all these virtues count for nothing if the performers are not alive to the ebb and flow of the musical argument. But the

Dudoks know exactly where the music needs to move forward, and where it needs repose. This means that the structural cogency of each movement is clearly mapped out. Perhaps in comparison with some other ensembles, the tempos they adopt for the fleet-of-foot *Scherzo* and boisterous *Finale* are more deliberate. But likewise, this proves to be an advantage, allowing not only for absolute lucidity throughout, but also making it much easier to pinpoint those moments of humour that pepper the music. *Erik Levi*

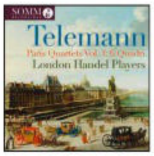
PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Clarity and light: Dudok Quartet Amsterdam unlock the vivid colours of Tchaikovsky's quartets

YURI ANDRIES

Telemann

Paris Quartets Nos 1-6 (Vol. 1)
London Handel Players
SOMM Recordings SOMMCD 0698
74:03 mins



This promises to be the first in a series embracing Telemann's so-called 'Paris Quartets'. The album contains his first publication of *Quadri*, featuring two works termed Concerto, two headed Sonata and two which the composer termed Suite or *Balletto*. The varied titles reflect aspects of form and content. Scored for flute, violin, cello or viola da gamba and continuo, they were published in Hamburg in 1730. Strictly speaking these are not Paris Quartets, for though they were indeed subsequently published in Paris the edition was pirated, somewhat to the annoyance of Telemann who saw that the same should not happen again when he published his six *Nouveaux Quatuors* following his Parisian sojourn of 1737-38.

Telemann's *Quadri* are unfailingly engaging pieces. Quantz regarded the quartet, or a sonata with three concertante instruments and bass, as the touchstone of a genuine contrapuntist. He had Telemann in mind, and it is not difficult to hear why. Counterpoint, pleasing melody and transparent textures are among the many virtues present here; and they are not overlooked or undervalued in the sensitive and intimate colloquy of the London Handel Players. The interplay and contrasting manners of Italian and French styles are elegantly crafted and effortless in their gestures and all strands of the texture are equal beneficiaries. The players' spontaneous response to Telemann's exquisite sensibility is at once evidenced in the *Soave* of the A major Sonata. In short, few if any expressive detail is ignored and affective moments in the composer's dialogue are savoured to the full. *Nicholas Anderson*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Anna Thorvaldsdottir

Ubique
Claire Chase (flute), Katinka Kleijn, Seth Parker Woods (cello), Cory Smythe (piano)
Sono Luminus DSL-92280 45 mins

In 2012, flautist Claire Chase embarked on an extraordinary 24-year project to expand the repertoire and musical boundaries of her instrument. Each year sees the premiere of a new commission culminating in 2036, the 100th anniversary of Varèse's seminal solo work, *Density 21.5*. Anna Thorvaldsdottir's *Ubique* (2023) is the tenth instalment of the project, 'Density 2036: part x'.

With pre-constructed electronics, it's written in 11 sections for a quartet comprising concert, bass and contrabass flutes; piano and two cellos, recorded here in a single, committed take by Chase, Cory Smythe, Katinka Kleijn and Seth Parker Woods.

As the scoring might suggest, low sounds are key. These mostly dominate the textures, growing from and ultimately returning to a rumbling, glitchy electronic base. Drones and sustained layers of sound – both embedding and supporting the various flutes – are punctuated by sudden bursts of activity across the ensemble in scurrying gestures, stabbing chords and half-formed riffs and melodies.

Thorvaldsdottir describes *Ubique* (Latin for 'everywhere') as inspired by 'the notion of being everywhere at the same time, an enveloping omnipresence' – and indeed the effect is one of an almost ritualistic semi-saturation of sound through which Chase skilfully weaves, burbles, whispers, percussively slaps and occasionally vocalises.

Yet 45 minutes is a long time to sustain the given material. Thorvaldsdottir excels in the constant expansion and contraction of layers, creating structures at once immersive and elusive. But here the juxtaposition of 'enigmatic lyricism and atmospheric distortion' begins to feel a little self-cancelling as the piece goes on. *Steph Power*

PERFORMANCE ★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

New Baroque

Sonatas by Raphael Amadio Fusco, Fabricio Maximiliano Gatta, Salvatore Passantino, David Jason Snow, Alexander Unseth and Andrew Wilson
Ada Witczyk, Simon Standage (violin), Dominika Maszczyńska (harpsichord)
FHR FHR171D 46:55 mins

This is the second collaboration between Polish-British Baroque violinist Ada Witczyk and First Hand Records. Through her Růžičková Composition Competition, founded in 2020, Witczyk has inspired, selected, championed and disseminated new works for her instrument. This album with music by the latest winners, presents sonatas for Baroque violin/s and harpsichord, which, in Witczyk's own words 'explore the richness of Baroque instruments with a modern twist'.

Much of this repertoire is characterised by distinctive and appealing approaches to tonality coupled with the rhythmic essence of the dance, so fundamental to Baroque music. These aspects are imaginatively explored in three works for solo violin and harpsichord: Raphael Amadio Fusco's four-movement Sonata, 'The Summer Folly' from Andrew Wilson's *Vanbrugh Sonata* and Fabricio Maximiliano Gatta's three-movement suite.

For the other three pieces on the album Witczyk is joined by her former violin teacher Simon Standage. Among these works, Snow's *L'apothéose de Tati* is a rhythmically exciting and melodically inspired portrait of the eccentricities of the fictional character Monsieur Hulot. Salvatore Passantino's *Ostination* is an invigorating homage to the much-loved Baroque passacaglia, featuring variations of breathtaking virtuosity. Alexander Unseth's *One of Seven* characterises his relationship with his siblings in an unashamedly tonal idiom.

Plaudits again to Ada Witczyk and First Hand Records for such an artistically enterprising and musically engaging album. Here's to Ada Witczyk and further rounds of the Růžičková Composition Competition! *Ingrid Pearson*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Yellow Butterfly *– Latin American Favourites*

Works by Granda, Jobim, Piazzolla et al
Dana Zemtsov (viola), Anna Fedorova (piano), Nicholas Schwartz (double bass), Angelo Verploegen (trumpet)
Channel Classics CCS47525 77:26 mins

Given her mixed background (Mexican, Dutch and Russian), it's no wonder that violist Dana Zemtsov's discography veers all over the place. Over six previous albums for Channel Classics she's given us Bartók, Hindemith, motley Russians, Ernest Bloch, French beauties and a programme entitled *Dutch Hidden Gems*. Born in Mexico City, she is fully entitled to spend her seventh album in Latin America, though this programme of mostly unhelpful arrangements of popular songs from the 1940s upwards serves neither her art or repertoire very well.

The recording is one problem, for whenever Zemtsov's viola comes into the vicinity of the ensemble's piano, bandoneon or trumpet, it sounds as if she's playing a distance away, hiding behind a curtain. The arrangements make their own contribution to lowering the temperature of music supposed either to smoulder seductively or radiate intense heat: cocktail bar doodling from Fedorova, cool jazz equivalents from Verploegen, assorted trinkets and little plucked niceties from percussion and bass.

The most persuasive and pungent track is a viola and double bass version of Piazzolla's *La Calle 92*. Claudio Constantini's arrangement of Luis Floriana Bonfá's *Manhã de Carnaval* is also effective. The low point might be the ungainly viola/bandoneon pairing for Juan José Mosalini's *Aller et retour*. In between these poles, Manuel Ponce's 1912 favourite *Estrellita* and later big hits like Chabuca Granda's *La flor de la canela* and Osvaldo Farrés's *Quizás, quizás, quizás* hobble along, their music's potency generally dulled, and Zemtsov's flair and finesse left to sputter in the dark. *Geoff Brown*

PERFORMANCE ★★
RECORDING ★★

BRIEF NOTES

Ludovico Einaudi **The Summer Portraits**

Ludovico Einaudi (piano), Federico Mecozzi (violin), Redi Hasa (cello) et al
Decca 680 6162 66 mins

Inspired by 1950s painted Tuscan landscapes and memories of long ago summers, this wistful selection is tinged with melancholy, Einaudi's kaleidoscopic piano lines front and centre. *Pathos* (featuring the strings of the RPO) is a highlight, but it's the intimate pieces like the disarmingly beautiful *Maria Callas* for piano and cello which seduce the most. *Michael Beek* ★★★★

R Strauss **Violin Sonata; Piano Quartet; Capriccio – Sextet; Violin Concerto***

Renaud Capuçon (violin) et al; *Vienna Symphony/Petr Popelka
DG 486 7082 180:11 mins (3CD)

Capuçon's three-disc Strauss tribute includes recent accounts of the Violin Concerto, Violin Sonata and Piano Quartet alongside earlier recordings. The Vienna Symphony is luxurious in the Concerto, against which Capuçon's poise and precision contrast beautifully. There's a mournful simplicity to the Sonata and the Piano Quartet channels pleasingly darker hues. *Charlotte Smith* ★★★★

Changes **Octets by Enescu and Respighi**

Roctet *Challenge Classics CC 720001 65:02 mins*

The two main works here – Respighi's Double Quartet in D minor and Enescu's Octet in C major – date from 1900, at which point their composers were, respectively, just out of and still just in their teens. The two evidently had very different outlooks, with Respighi bathing in late-Romanticism while Enescu's more sparely scored, folk-inflected work looks more to the future. Both are admirably played. *Jeremy Pound* ★★★★

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Piano Nocturnes brought into the light

Michael Church enjoys this glowing reappraisal of John Field by Alice Sara Ott

ALICE SARA OTT
JOHN FIELD · COMPLETE NOCTURNES

Field

Complete Nocturnes

Alice Sara Ott (piano)

DG 486 6238 73:22 mins

John Field has spent his posthumous life in a state of permanent eclipse, with Mozart, Beethoven, Chopin, Schumann and Liszt all pushing him into the role of a mere walk-on – good only for an occasional encore, in the great stream of music history. But as Alice Sara Ott observes, in Russia – where he spent most of his life – he was a megastar. It's now time, she believes, for a reappraisal.

> With its pearlised touch, Alice Sara Ott's pianism is a delight

His most often played Nocturne is the fifth in B flat major, with its freewheeling melody and charming effects, but when these pieces are listened to as a complete set, the impression one gets is of a gradual self-liberation from the constricting stylistic constraints within which Field began composing in this form.

The first eight pieces all follow the same pattern, with their ornamentation sufficiently varied to hold our attention, but the tenth might almost be a Mozartian slow movement in its tone and cadences. The 13th marks the point where Field casts decorum aside, with a dark and sinister opening and a slow melody in a walking bass. And in the 16th he seems to have finally burst his bonds, with the shocking incursion of a stretch of thunderous bass. In its mannerisms and structure, the 18th piece could almost be a late Beethoven Bagatelle, a small work with a much larger work struggling to get out.

The German-Japanese Alice Sara Ott had a brilliant pianistic career in her teens, but at 21 she was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. Now 36, she has never stopped performing; this album is just the latest measure of her heroic triumph over adversity. With its pearlised touch, and in the halo of a golden glow, her pianism is a delight: Field could not have wished for a better advocate.

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Best in her Field: Alice Sara Ott is a great advocate for the composer

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JS Bach

Lute Suites (Trans. for piano)

Eleonor Bindman (piano)

Orchid Classics ORC100366 56:18 mins

Since the revival of JS Bach's music in the early-19th century his works have attained canonical status. From among Bach's seven surviving works most associated with the lute, we hear three transcriptions by pianist Eleonor Bindman.

Interpreting Bach on a modern grand piano presents players with opportunities regarding dynamics, pedalling and touch; aspects demanding approaches which acknowledge the responsibilities associated with each. Bindman opens with BWV 996 where her touch fails to elicit a sufficient range of timbral colours, tempo rubato often distorts any sense of pulse and with some ponderous tempo choices. The *Allemande* and *Bourrée* sound more like technical exercises.

BWV 997 sounds similarly earnest and often rigid, falling short of other commercially available offerings. BWV 998 is already known to pianists through transcriptions by Carl Tausig and by Ferruccio Busoni, although Bindman's album notes make no mention of this. Her interpretation sounds slightly dogged and rather mechanical, needing shape for repeated notes of the same pitch, as well as a more eloquent presentation of the interrelationship between dissonance and consonance. With muted bowed string textures in its first incarnation 'Betrachte, meine Seel' is an odd choice for addition to the solo piano repertoire. Bindman is committed to providing pianists with wider access to Bach's music through her arrangements. This seems unnecessary in the light of reputable editions of this repertoire freely available online (1897: *Bach Gesellschaft* and 1976: *Neue Bach-Ausgabe*). With a recorded piano sound which lacks warmth this is a disappointing release.

Ingrid Pearson

PERFORMANCE ★★★
RECORDING ★★★

Beethoven

Symphony No. 9; O Freunde (Trans. by Scharwenka)

Tesa Uys and Ben Schoeman (piano)

SOMM Recordings SOMMCD 0697 66:22 mins

SOMM
BEETHOVEN SYMPHONIES

There's a danger that over familiarity can diminish our appreciation of great art: we look without seeing, listen without truly hearing. This recording turns any such notion on its head. It takes a piece universally well known, Beethoven's revolutionary Ninth Symphony, and through a powerfully realised piano duet version conveys all the thrill of encountering it for the first time.

Admittedly I'm a little late to the party as this is the final volume in an acclaimed six-part set in which Tessa Uys and Ben Schoeman blaze through Xaver Scharwenka's transcriptions of Beethoven's symphonies. Inspired by the quality of performance and musical revelations of this one alone, I'll certainly be working my way back through the others.

Scharwenka followed in an esteemed tradition of reshaping orchestral works for piano and boasted a direct connection to Beethoven via his own teacher who studied with Czerny, in turn a pupil of Beethoven. I'd venture to say it shows. The Ninth commands formidable orchestral and vocal forces and is one of the most complex of Beethoven's symphonies, but there is no absence of power or depth of sound here. The propulsive drama of the score is sustained, and there is something more: a spaciousness and clarity that illuminate the unravelling of musical ideas and the subtle shifts in harmonies and dynamics that can be lost among heavier orchestral textures. The *Adagio*'s beautifully expressive melody unfolds across the keyboard as if always meant to be heard this way, drawing us closer to its intimate heart, before four hands unleash the exhilarating force of nature that is its heroic ending. *Suzanne Rolt*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Gibbons

Keyboard Works

Stephen Farr (keyboard)
Resonus RES10355 69:51 mins

Keyboard Works
Orlando Gibbons
Stephen Farr

Marking the 400th anniversary of Orlando Gibbons's death in 1625 Stephen Farr has chosen a programme of keyboard music which he plays variously on the chapel organ of Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge, and a harpsichord after an anonymous Italian instrument.

Gibbons, who was born in 1583, belongs to the Golden Age of English music. He has long been well-known for his madrigals, especially perhaps *The Silver Swan*, and his Anglican church music. Less familiar perhaps, are his keyboard pieces of which the most substantial and the most impressive are the Fantasias. Eight are featured here, including the only one for two-manual organ, though it is thought that Gibbons, himself, intended it for one manual. Farr's account of the Fantasias is thoughtful, technically fluent and concentrated. They are superbly crafted pieces, as the counterpoint over and over again demonstrates. In a lucidly written note, David Smith quotes Thomas Morley's definition of a fantasia as a piece without words where 'a musician taketh a point [melody] at his pleasure, and wresteth and turneth it as he list...' Farr treats the Fantasias with the seriousness that Gibbons surely intended, thereby providing a desirable contrast with the somewhat lighter pieces among which are an appealing Ground, an Alman, Coranto, two Pavans one of which is the widely known 'Lord Salisbury' Pavan with its accompanying Galliard. The delightful and on occasion virtuosic *Peascod Time or The Hunt's Up* rounds off Farr's well-constructed recording in which the respective characters of both instruments are captured with ideal resonance. *Nicholas Anderson*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Holst

The Planets (trans. for organ)

John Challenger (organ)
Salisbury Cathedral CD2024 60:25 mins

The Planets

Organ transcriptions seem to be back in vogue: it's no longer a case of woolly town-hall Wagner, but of creating a 'new' repertoire for the organ. As John Challenger shows here with *The Planets*, the instrument and ambience of Salisbury Cathedral are both well suited to the 'cosmic' dimensions of Holst's most famous work. But in his role as assistant director of music at Salisbury, Challenger also had other considerations in mind, including an educational aspect to the project and the production of an accompanying film (downloadable via the booklet). Yet this is an enjoyable musical experience in its own right, one that makes you think afresh about familiar music – a pioneering example, after all, of English modernism.

***Planets* realigned: John Challenger reimagines Holst's suite on the organ**

HANNES CASPER, GETTY

Challenger rightly rejects the word 'transcription' in favour of arrangement, and his reworking here is seldom designed to mimic the orchestra. In the opening 'Mars' movement, the reeds of Salisbury's Father Willis organ supply growling menace, an effect that, as also later in the knotty *scherzo* of 'Uranus', evokes the soundworld of Louis Vierne (high praise). 'Mercury' receives a performance of fleet virtuosity and 'Jupiter' emerges as an impressive *toccata* (with occasional hints of the fairground), though the organ perhaps reinforces the quasi-religious overtones here due to the big tune having been set as a hymn – something Holst himself disliked. To close, 'Neptune' is full of mystery, and includes Holst's ethereal voices: whatever the logic, since this could have been a stand-alone organ work, if you have a choir, why not flaunt it? *John Allison*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★

Paganini

24 Caprices; plus works by Berlioz, Cervello, Kreisler, Sarasate, Saint-Saëns, Gabriela Ortiz et al

María Dueñas (violin) et al; Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin/Mihhail Gerts
DG 486 5708 164:22 mins (2CD)

MARÍA DUEÑAS
PAGANINI: 24 CAPRICES

Plenty of recordings of the Paganini *Caprices* are out there, but the extras add imagination here, with Dueñas joined by other musicians: Itamar Golan and Alexander Malofeev are the pianists in Sarasate's *Caprice basque* and Ortiz's *De cuerda y madera*, which show off the variety of Dueñas's tone and the range of her technique, although the highest notes aren't always absolutely in tune. She's paired with guitarist Raphaël Feuillâtre in Kreisler's *Caprice viennois*, and there's always a keen sense of characterisation in her playing, which emerges to the full in the three works with orchestra (the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin under Mihhail Gerts). Saint-Saëns's *Caprice andalous* shows why it is less well-known than the *Introduction and Rondo capriccioso* – the tunes aren't as good – but both show stylish rubato and tonal richness where needed, and the performance of Berlioz's *Rêverie and Caprice* makes me wonder why the piece is so relatively neglected.

The Paganini *Caprices* have energy in the bowing from the outset, confident octaves and portamento, and impeccable double stops. Again, there's a slight tendency for intonation to lapse at speed, especially in the higher reaches: the Fifth Caprice suffers from this, but the energy is exhilarating, and the individual musical character of each caprice is nicely painted, with the cheeky insouciance of the Ninth and 13th, the march-like 14th and fantastical 15th especially well-caught, and an exceptionally affectionate reading of the 24th. You could listen straight through, but I'd recommend random shuffling of the Paganini with the other composers, to give even more variety and surprise. *Martin Cotton*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

BRIEF NOTES

Ravel **Daphnis et Chloé; La Valse**

Yi Lin Jiang (piano) *Anclef 20250307 67 mins*

That Ravel's large-scale orchestral music is so richly effective in piano-reduction form is remarkable – but in the capable hands of Yi Lin Jiang, the colour and mystery are retained. *La Valse* is a triumph, with a rollicking momentum that perfectly captures the refined waltz form, grotesquely distorted by post-war disillusionment. (CS) ★★★★

Échos **Works by Chopin, Granados & Albéniz**

Charles Richard-Hamelin (piano) *Analekta AN 2 9149 75:53 mins*

With neat mathematical precision, eight Chopin waltzes and his *Allegro de concert*, Op. 46 are counterbalanced by Granados's *Allegro de concierto*, Op. 46 and eight-movement *Valses Poéticos*, with Albéniz's sensuously sultry *La Vega* in between. As alluring in the Albéniz as he is both elegantly light-footed and expressive in the waltzes, the Canadian pianist Charles Richard-Hamelin is in delightful form here. (JP) ★★★★

Unity (Affinity)

Works by Arlen, JS Bach, Morricone, Moss et al

Rosey Chan (piano) *Platoon PLAT2574 14 mins (Digital EP)*

Wellness and healing play a large role in pianist Rosey Chan's endeavours at the keyboard, and this short offering finds her arranging and performing a set of timeless tunes designed to bring simple joy. And it succeeds, with Bach snuggling up to a song from *Sesame Street*, 'Somewhere Over the Rainbow' and a Morricone classic, though it is all too brief. (MB) ★★★

ad tendo

Works by Biber, Hildegard, Reena Esmail et al

Simone Porter (violin)

Bright Shiny Things BSTC-0217

42:24 mins

The ten short sections of Reena Esmail's *Drishti* explore open strings, harmonics, double stops and long melodic lines, often infused with portamentos: perhaps an acknowledgement of Esmail's Indian heritage. Porter is completely secure in the technical demands of the music, and also has an unerring sense of pacing, so that nothing outstays its welcome, and the movements – sometimes tenuous, sometimes aggressive – add up to more than the sum of their parts, with the subtleties of the performance beautifully realised in the warm, detailed recording.

Salonen describes *Lachen Verlernt* as a chaconne, where 'the harmony remains the same throughout the whole piece; only the surface, the top layer of the music changes.' That harmony often nudges tonality, and is expressed through double stops, accurately and effortlessly despatched.

O Virtus Sapientiae by Hildegard von Bingen is the basis of Marckx's *Improvisation*, unfolding over a drone at first, then gradually fragmenting and extending the basic melodic shape, but never losing its harmonic root. Less immediately gripping is Norman's *Sabina*, moving from a ghostly opening to a frenetic climax, and back again, but lacking a strong melodic identity.

After that, going back over 300 years to the closing *Passacaglia* from Biber's *Mystery Sonatas* comes as quite a shock, but its devotional character reflects the concept of the album, taken from Simone Weil, and spoken right at the end: 'Attention taken to its highest degree is the same thing as prayer. Absolutely unmixed attention is prayer.' *Martin Cotton*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Fantasie

Chopin: Piano Sonata No. 2 in B-flat minor; Nocturnes Nos 7 & 8; **Debussy:** La fille aux cheveux de lin; Bruyères; **Scriabin:** Preludes, Op. 11 Nos 1 & 2; Piano Sonata No. 2; **plus works by Bonds, Price and Still**

Jeneba Kanneh-Mason (piano)

Sony Classical 19802889462 72:50 mins

While the Kanneh-Mason family has an extensive shared discography, this is the first solo offering from Jeneba Kanneh-Mason, the fifth in the seven-sibling chart-topping family. She wanted to open with a significant work, so has waited until she felt able to tackle Chopin's Piano Sonata No. 2 in B-flat minor – and the time and consideration she has given this work is clear. The turbulent opening movement is tackled with great lightness of touch: the dramatic shifts in mood are carefully and thoughtfully done, never feeling heavy handed. Another Chopin work follows, this time his Nocturnes, which showcase Kanneh-Mason's poetic style and technical skill in approaching the challenging voicing of melodic lines.

At the heart of the album lie three works by three African American composers, beginning with a fantasy by Florence Price – an inevitable choice perhaps, following her assured performance of Price's Piano Concerto at her 2021 Proms debut. As in the Nocturnes, Kanneh-Mason never takes a musical idea and beats you around the head with it: if anything, it feels improvised and throwaway. It's refreshing to have a young musician not deliver something in a way that feels overdeveloped and laboured.

This continues in the final act, with Preludes by Debussy and Scriabin. Kanneh-Mason cranks the piano open here, with an almost painterly style of expression. Scriabin's Sonata No. 2 closes proceedings with its gloriously turbulent *Presto*. A confident offering here – exciting to see where she takes us next. At this point, it feels almost trite to feature another Kanneh-Mason as a 'promising young talent', but they're undeniably doing something very right… *Freya Parr*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

Guess Who?

Felix Mendelssohn: Songs Without Words; Gondellied; **Fanny Mendelssohn:** Lieder für das Pianoforte, Opp 6 & 8 etc

Olga Pashchenko (piano)

Alpha Classics ALPHA1119 82:55 mins

Guess who? is the title of this album of music by Fanny and Felix Mendelssohn, and it's not as flippant a question as it first sounds. These two siblings shared not only DNA but also a deep musical bond, forged in their childhood as prodigies and continued into adulthood, even when the expectations of 19th-century society sent them on different paths. Felix became the feted public composer, while Fanny was told to keep her music at home.

Yet their artistic conversation continued, and they responded to each other's ideas in their compositions. They spoke a common musical language. So much so that when Queen Victoria told Felix that 'Italien' was her favourite of his songs, he was forced to confess that it was actually by his sister. And while history has often attributed the *Lieder ohne worte* (Songs Without Words) to Felix alone (he wrote 48 of them, published in eight volumes), the genre may have had roots in one of their childhood games, suggests Olga Pashchenko. Fanny certainly had her own version with her *Lieder für das pianoforte* (Songs for the piano; she wrote 12, published in three volumes).

Whatever the truth of the matter, their story has sparked this superlative album, with a selection of the siblings' pieces brilliantly programmed and played by Pashchenko. Her 1836 fortepiano is a wonderfully warm instrument, chosen for its capacity to inspire 'a more speaking or reciting quality' and 'rhetorical delivery'. Whether it's in the tumultuous restless numbers, the flowing gondolier songs, the tragic pomp of the funeral march or the spritely step of a spring song, Pashchenko gives us eloquence and emotion, passion and poetry. The title might hook you in, but it's the sheer life force of her playing that will make you stay. *Rebecca Franks*

PERFORMANCE ★★★★★
RECORDING ★★★★★

World

Michael Church packs his bags for a trip around the latest World Music releases

April round-up

In 1947 the great American song collector Alan Lomax went to America's notorious Parchman Farm maximum security penitentiary to record work songs by inmates and released it on LP. Seventy years later, producer ***Ian Brennan*** went back and recorded a routine Sunday morning service *(Parchman Prison Prayer)*. But when Brennan gets a good idea he runs with it, and here is his sequel to that sequel: ***Parchman Prison Prayer: Another Mississippi Sunday Morning***. In just 30 minutes we go on a gamut of emotional exploration. It begins with *falsetto* humming and proceeds via life-stories and whispered confidences to climax in an antiphonal chant, followed by the warming comfort of a honky-tonk piano. My only regret is that there are no notes of any kind on the performers. Was that forbidden? *(Glitterbeat GBCD164)* ★★★★

It's hard to pinpoint what makes ***Lo'Jo***'s ***Feuilles Fauves*** such an engaging 40 minutes. This group may be based in Anjou, but they are internationalists through and through. Describing themselves as musical nomads, they draw their inspiration from a mix of French *chanson*, North-African songs, music from the Indian Ocean, jazz, blues, electronics and even a whiff of European classical music. As their spokesman has said, 'Our music is an anarchic garden that we try to cultivate, to make it both beautiful and wild.' René Lacaille, the accordionist from Réunion, is a long-term star in his own right, but the way he and the others meld their voices is quintessentially democratic. *(Yotanka Records)* ★★★

The three multi-instrumentalists in Muziekpublique's latest album, ***Peixe e Limão*** (Fish and Lime) present a hotbed of European sounds, and their lyrics eschew conventionally explicit politics: their messages concern 'unromantic love, migration without heroism and obsessive loneliness'. Their music is unpretentious, focusing on cello, guitar and voice, but it creates an intimate magic which will be seductive, provided their singer Flavia Clementi's artlessly little-girl tone doesn't grate on you. *(Muziekpublique)* ★★★

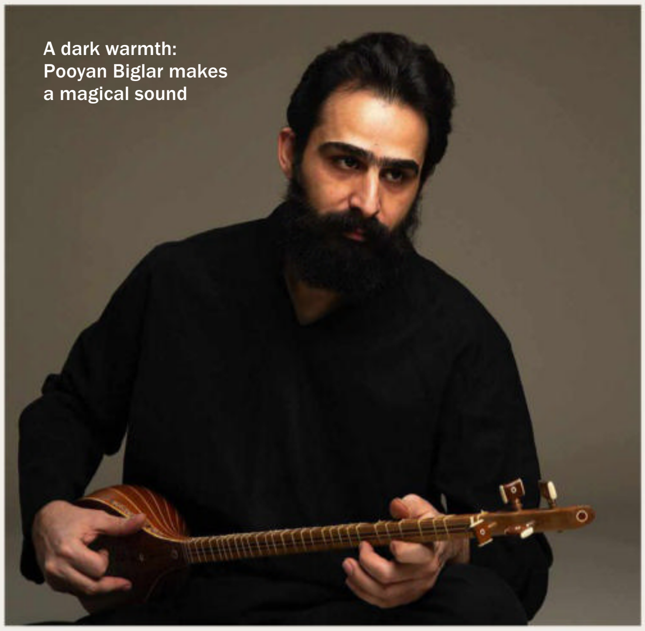
Who could fail to thrill to the voice which launches ***Songs of the Roma*** on its helter-skelter journey to the heart of the Romany tradition in the Balkans? Singer-violinist ***Masha Natanson*** takes us straight back to the soundworld of Taraf de Haïdouks and 'Queen of the Gypsies' Esma Redžepova, several of whose songs she sings. Yet this extraordinary album originated in Scotland. Joined by cellist ***Justyna Jablonska***, cimbalom player Gyula Csik and double bassist Gyula Lazar, the Scottish guitarist-musicologist ***Simon Thacker*** has delved deeply into the music he found in Romania and Macedonia, and has woven its elements into electrifying new arrangements. What makes this album unique is the way the liner notes go into detail to examine tunings, textures, and rhythms. *(Slap The Moon STMRCD06)* ★★★★

If this magazine had an early-music section, that's where ***The Secrets of Andalusia*** would naturally belong, as a fascinating musicological trawl through three centuries of Byzantine- and Moorish-influenced European chamber music. ***Lux Musicae London*** work delicate spells on period instruments, with three superb guest artists: soprano Victoria Couper, kanun player Konstantinos Glynos and flamenco guitarist and oud player Ignacio Lusardi Monteverde. *(First Hand Records FHR 157)* ★★★★★

WORLD CHOICE

A plucky Persian set

Pooyan Biglar charms with the singing tone and arresting style of his beautiful setar



A dark warmth: Pooyan Biglar makes a magical sound

M MORADI

Pooyan Biglar

Parchin (Hedge)

Pooyan Biglar (setar)

Navaarts 34:44 mins

This outstanding recording was created in a single session alongside oud player Saeid Nayeb Mohammadi's *A Memento of Istanbul* (also on Navaarts). Ideally they should be listened to as twin halves of one single concert. Pooyan Biglar and Saeid Nayeb Mohammadi are noted masters, respectively, of the setar and the oud, two lutes evoking very different soundworlds.

Persian classical music – as Iranians still insist on terming it – has had a chequered history, sometimes encouraged by the government, other times persecuted. In some Iranian cities, women performers are currently forbidden to play or sing to mixed audiences. This political sensitivity is a back-handed tribute to the music's power, and young virtuosos are more numerous than ever.

It's always improvised, but in obedience to strict structural rules. The classical canon is based on seven primary modes called *dastgahs*, with each *dastgah* having its own scales and specific pitches. Those pitches may sometimes sound 'flat' to European ears, but in that subtle tuning lies all the music's charm.

Pooyan's arresting style is complemented by his warm, dark, singing tone; Saeid's finger-picking is brilliantly mercurial. Together they create a magic hour. ★★★★★

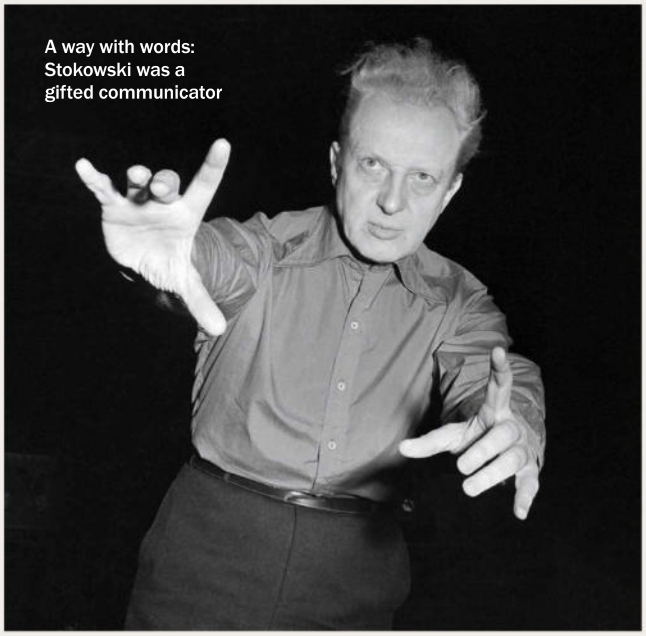
From the archives

Andrew McGregor looks over this month's reissued and live archive recordings

ARCHIVE CHOICE

A rare front row seat...

This fascinating album offers us the chance to listen in on a Leopold Stokowski rehearsal


A way with words: Stokowski was a gifted communicator

Frankly Speaking with Leopold Stokowski

Works by Berlioz, De Falla; plus rehearsal and interviews
San Francisco Symphony Orchestra; BBC Symphony Orchestra/Leopold Stokowski et al
SOMM Recordings ARIADNE 5035 75:03 mins

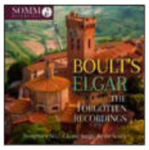
[Music] 'expresses some kind of depth of feeling which I cannot describe to you, as words are not my medium'. Conductor Leopold Stokowski interviewed for BBC Radio's 'Frankly Speaking' series, and proving the opposite. Such a gifted communicator, as we hear in rehearsal, in concert and in the media. The rehearsal is from 1952 with the San Francisco Symphony, in De Falla's *El amor brujo* and Berlioz's *Roman Carnival*, a little formal to begin with, presumably because Stokowski knew that a radio audience would be eavesdropping. But humour breaks through when he asks for a *diminuendo* and alludes to his famous tendency to take liberties with scores: 'It's even printed! Even when it's printed you don't do it, when it's legal!' Cue laughter… But as Jon Tolansky reminds us in his excellent booklet essay (he played under Stokowski), the maestro could be confrontationally disagreeable. The concert that followed hasn't survived, so the album uses an excellent BBC Proms performance of the De Falla from 12 years later by which time Stokowski was 82, his love of the music and command of colour and atmosphere undiminished. ★★★★

April round-up

Constantin Silvestri's insistence on extra rehearsal time as music director of the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra paid musical dividends, as we hear in these broadcast performances from 1966-68. 'Ibéria' from Debussy's ***Images*** is a vivid evocation of Spanish scenes, the night scents enveloping us, before a festival procession sweeps us up in rowdy celebration. Ravel's ***Pavane*** is a gently contemplative *intermezzo*, before De Falla's ***Nights in the Gardens of Spain*** transports us to the exotic beauty of the Alhambra palace. The suites from De Falla's ***Three-Cornered Hat*** are alive with joyful energy and Spanish dance rhythms. *(ICA Classics ICA5182)* ★★★★

Leonard Bernstein was one of the greatest communicators in classical music, and this album from the archives of German Radio reminds us that his long relationship with the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra began in 1948, when many Jewish musicians were still boycotting Germany. It blossomed after this all-***Beethoven*** concert in Munich in 1976 in aid of Amnesty International. You feel the power of Bernstein's Beethoven in the Fifth Symphony, but more so in an elemental performance of *Leonore Overture* No. 3 from the opera *Fidelio*. *(BR Klassik 900228)* ★★★

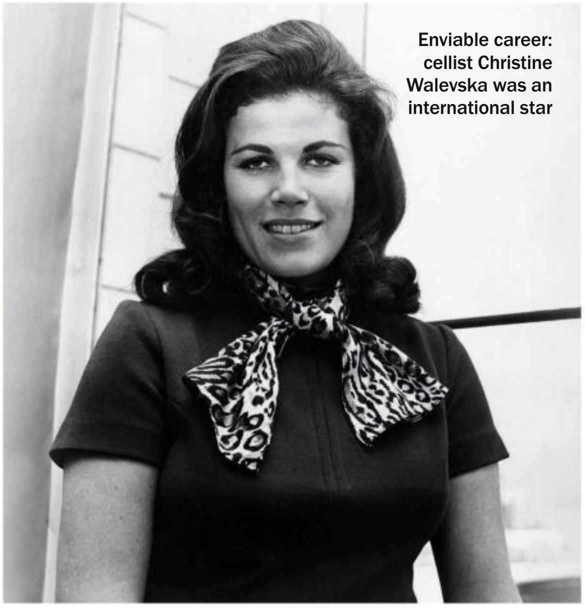
Boult's Elgar: the Forgotten Recordings is an intriguing title. What have we missed? We hear Adrian Boult in a stilted, scripted interview with Elgar's daughter in Bedford in 1944, the 'somewhere in England' where the BBC Symphony Orchestra was based during the war, and their performance of *In the South* a few weeks later is urgent and energetic. Boult conducted and recorded Elgar's Second Symphony many times, but here's a long-overlooked recording with the Scottish National Orchestra for Waverley Records in 1963, Boult finding at times an almost ethereal lightness. The *Choral Songs* are still rarities, studio performances from the BBC Chorus in 1967, and Boult's memories of his encounters with Elgar are intriguing extras. *(SOMM Recordings ARIADNE 5037-2)* ★★★



More BBC Recordings, and a major release for anyone exploring the 32 symphonies of ***Havergal Brian***. The last four are from 1967 and '68, the end of a journey that began with his epic 'Gothic' Symphony half a century earlier. No. 29 is comparatively classical and lyrical, Myer Fredman conducting the Philharmonia. No. 30 is more experimental, ending with a powerful *passacaglia* from Lionel Friend and the BBC Symphony Orchestra. The single-movement No. 31 is a delightfully conversational free fantasy in the hands of Charles Mackerras, while No. 32 is no symphonic farewell, still full of energy and invention. *(Heritage HTGCD130)* ★★★★

Cécile Chaminade and her contemporaries play Chaminade, and they do, delightfully for the most part. We have to peer through the fog of over a century of history, however, to hear ***Chaminade*** herself in London recording sessions from 1901 at the height of her fame. Despite the swishing and hissing, her restlessly propulsive playing of *Air de Ballet* brings it to life. It's a relief to encounter a fuller piano sound in the later recordings, Mark Hambourg's powerfully projected *Autumn*, and finally Shura Cherkassky in 1950. A window onto another world. *(APR 5647)* ★★★

Andrew McGregor is the presenter of Radio 3's *Record Review*, broadcast each Saturday afternoon from 2pm-4pm



Enviable career: cellist Christine Walevska was an international star

GETTY

Unboxed

This month's round-up includes sets featuring Christine Walevska, Karajan and Steve Reich

The Beauty & the Bow *(Rhine Classics RH-034)* is an eight-disc collection of rare recordings by the American cellist ***Christine Walevska***, once hailed as the 'Goddess of Cello'. While she made many recordings for Philips, this set features gems from her own private collection. They include performances recorded for radio and home recordings, captured 1958-2014. It's a broad view of her celebrated career and international appeal; indeed, there are concert recordings from the US, Japan, Colombia, Venezuela, Brazil, Germany, France, Belgium and Spain. It's a wide range of music, too, with Walevska taking on everything from Bach to lesser-known works by Popper, William Schuman and Bolognini.

It remains one of the greatest ever conductor and orchestra partnerships, and in ***Herbert von Karajan – Live in Berlin 1953-1969*** *(Berlin Phil BPHR 240291)* we get a fascinating slice of ***Karajan***'s years as chief conductor of the Berlin Phil. They recorded plenty, of course, but this 24-SACD set of 23 concerts (recorded for radio) offers an alternative listening experience to that of the perfected studio distillation they did so meticulously. It's a varied selection, from big-boned German works (including three takes on Beethoven's Ninth) to then-newer works by the likes of Ligeti and Richard Rodney Bennett. There are star turns, too, with Glenn Gould for a 1957 performance of Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 3 and a set of Richard Strauss works with soprano Elisabeth Schwarzkopf.

Steve Reich – Collected Works *(Nonesuch 7559790418)* is a 27-disc release marking the influential American composer's 40 years with the label Nonesuch. He signed an exclusive deal with them in 1985 and, some 24 albums later, it represents a very full catalogue indeed. Sixty years of ***Reich***'s compositions feature across the selection and, from 1965's *It's Gonna Rain* to 2023's *Jacob's Ladder*, it is certainly comprehensive. In addition to the recordings, which feature Reich himself and a host of artists including flautist Ransom Wilson, the San Francisco Symphony and Bang on a Can, the set includes booklet essays by the likes of Michael Tilson Thomas, Nico Muhly and Reich himself. ***Michael Beek***

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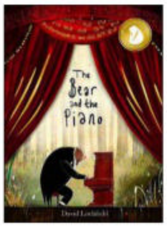
Books

Our critics cast their eyes over the latest selection of books on all things music

The Bear and the Piano – 10th Anniversary Edition

David Litchfield

Frances Lincoln 30pp £7.99



If you're not acquainted with this totally charming children's book written and illustrated by David Litchfield, then its new tenth anniversary edition is your chance. A bear stumbles across an odd contraption in the forest, one which makes noise. With curiosity, time and persistence he begins to make it sing, develops a real talent (despite his bulk and the size of his paws on the keyboard) and is 'discovered' by human passers by. Bravely stepping out of his comfort zone to try and make it in the big city as a concert pianist, our ursine virtuoso follows his dreams and becomes the talk of the town. But despite sell-out concerts, album deals and the adulation of strangers, the bear realises he's missing home, the forest and his family too much.

Okay, it's obviously designed for young readers, with good messaging about following your dreams, but if you're a big kid at heart like me, you'll be easily won over by Litchfield's sweet tale and get lost in his beautiful pictures. *Michael Beek* ★★★★★

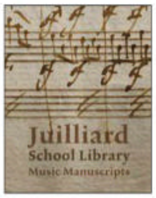
Juilliard School Library Music Manuscripts

Jane Gottlieb
and Richard Griscom

Scala Arts & Heritage 208pp (hb) £55

A generation ago I spent much time in the Juilliard School Library in New York, and I recall one day at the issue desk a student plaintively complaining, 'My teacher says I need the Bach Partitas for piano, but you only have the Bach Partitas for harpsichord!' Happily, the understanding of the past has since been transformed there, especially with the founding of a new historical performance faculty.

That initiative was funded by one-time Juilliard chairman Bruce Kovner, and it is his remarkable collection which is at the heart of this sumptuously produced guide to their holdings (including as it happens an original 1731 printing of those Bach Partitas). Manuscripts and early editions are here superbly photographed, their background explained by top-notch scholars including Christoph Wolff (Bach), Lewis Lockwood (Beethoven) and Michael Musgrave (Schumann and Brahms). What intrigued Kovner as the collector was the compositional process, so that is foregrounded here with many sketches and fragments.



There is a special emphasis in the collections on Ysaÿe, the spiritual arrangements of Margaret Bonds, and the most colourful pages are devoted to an entrancing set of 19th-century opera scores of the scholar Philip Gossett, along with his manuscript suggestions for vocal ornamentation. This book is both a visual treat and an important resource. *Nicholas Kenyon* ★★★★★

Chicago's classical roots: composer-pianist Margaret Bonds played her part in the city's rich musical history

ALAMY

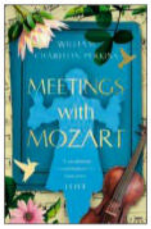
Meetings with Mozart

William Charlton-Perkins

Book Guild 208pp (pb) £7.99

This debut novel from South African writer William Charlton-Perkins offers a warm and informal exploration of Mozart's life and work, playfully situated in a contemporary setting.

The story centres around Horace, a recently retired South African opera director who founds an 'August Society for the Veneration of Wolfgang', who meet each month to talk all things Mozart. As this cheerfully varied collective (from opera singer to new age healer to retired 'exotic' dancer) share in their devotion for Mozart, so their bond grows deeper.



The book is certainly informative and abounds with colourful vignettes from Mozart's life, while the accompanying musical examples discussed are also appealing. At times though, the expositional dialogue between members as they exchange Mozart facts can feel clunky. More fun is Horace's day-dreamed stage play about the life of the composer, with lively excerpts of this imaginary play sprinkled throughout.

This is an intriguing hybrid novel, perhaps best suited to those similarly fascinated by Mozart and thus eager to spend time in Horace's 'August Society' themselves.
Kate Wakeling ★★★

South Side Impresarios – How Race Women Transformed Chicago's Classical Music Scene

Samantha Ege

Illinois 296pp (pb) £19.99

Florence Price became the first Black woman to have a symphony performed by a major US orchestra, when her Symphony in E minor was played by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in 1933. It's a moment that has been 'rediscovered' by the white musical mainstream in recent years, but pianist and musicologist Samantha Ege is less interested in telling a story of 'white validation toward artists of African descent' and wishes instead to turn our attention to 'those who put Black classical Chicago on a cultural map of their own making'.

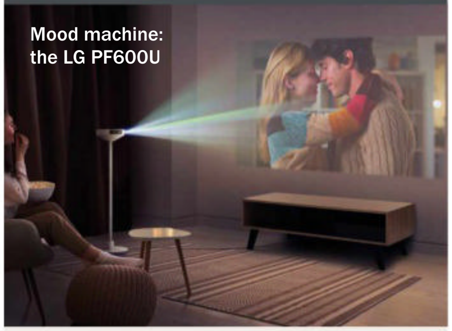
South Side Impresarios
Samantha Ege

Out of this desire has sprung a deeply researched academic book illuminating the rich cultural community of Chicago's South Side, where upper and upper-middle class Black women composers, concert artists, pedagogues, scholars, critics and impresarios worked tirelessly in the realm of classical music (such as impresario Maude Roberts George and composer-pianist Margaret Bonds). Ege's subject matter might be geographically specific, but the insights she gleans are broader. Her focus on the collective achievements of Black sisterhood and solidarity in this particular location and era offer a powerful corrective to the 'Great Man' theory of history.
Rebecca Franks ★★★★

Our expert *Chris Haslam* gives advice on buying the latest hi-fi equipment

Portable home cinema projectors for a top view

We recommend...



Mood machine: the LG PF600U

LG PF600U £tbc

Looking more like an accessory you'd pick up in IKEA, this soon-to-be-launched projector actually doubles as a floor lamp and Bluetooth speaker. It features Full HD resolution (1920 x 1080), 300 ANSI Lumens of brightness and great wireless audio, plus the light can even change colour to suit your mood. **lge.com**

Nebula Cosmos 4K SE £1,299

It's bigger than most 'compact' options, but there's no denying the image quality. I love watching this 4K design with 1,800 ANSI Lumens, and while I don't have a spare wall big enough for the maximum 200-inch display, I can happily view it for hours. Sound quality is surprisingly spacious, and having Google TV built in makes it effortless to use. **seenebula.com**

XGIMI Halo+ £609

Many battery-powered designs offer portability but sacrifice screen brightness, but with 700 Lumens and 1080p Full HD resolution this is an exception and is noticeably brighter than the competition. With 2.5hr playback and 2 x 5W Harman Kardon speakers, it also doubles nicely as a Bluetooth speaker for enjoying music. **xgimi.com**

High-definition drama: the Samsung LPU7D 4K delivers fully immersive sound

When we think of home cinema, most of us imagine dedicated rooms with plush chairs, ceiling-mounted projectors and eye-watering price tags. A quick online search reveals that a dedicated set-up can cost between £5,000 and £10,000, with speakers alone doubling that figure.

But you don't need to spend a fortune to enjoy a cinematic experience. Thanks to portable projectors and streaming technology, you can recreate the magic of the big screen at home with just a blank wall – whether you're rewatching *Amadeus* for the umpteenth time, enjoying a classic opera or hosting an outdoor movie night.

Portable projectors are compact, all-in-one devices that combine a projector, a Wi-Fi-connected computer, a battery and built-in speakers. And while they may not match the multiplex, they can project HD images between 90 and 300 inches – far bigger than most TVs.

Leading brands include Nebula, BenQ, XGIMI, Epson, Samsung and LG, and prices range from £250 to around £2,500, reflecting image quality, sound and brightness. For casual users, a Full HD (1080p) projector offers excellent clarity – but to future-proof your investment, consider a 4K (UHD) projector.

Brightness, measured in Lumens or Lumens ANSI, is a key factor. A brighter projector allows you to use it in well-lit rooms and project larger images. Contrast ratio – the difference between brightest whites and darkest blacks – is equally important. Look for at least 1,500:1 to 2,000:1.

Premium options like the **Samsung LPU7D 4K** (£2,699) are ideal for those seeking a high-end experience. This short-throw projector can display a 100-inch image from just 26.7cm away. It also features built-in Dolby Atmos speakers, delivering immersive sound. Many compact models, like the **Nebula Capsule Air** (£399), come with accessories such as tripods.

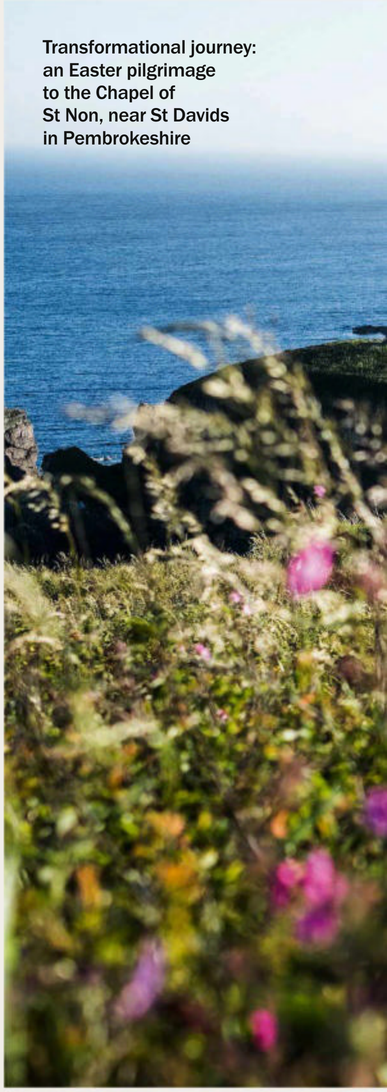
> You don't need to spend a fortune to enjoy a cinematic experience

Most portable projectors include Wi-Fi and Bluetooth, and multiple ports like HDMI, allowing you to connect DVD players, game consoles, laptops or smartphones. These devices typically run on Android software, enabling you to download apps like Netflix, Disney+ and Amazon Prime directly.

Portable projectors typically last two to four hours on a single charge, making them suitable for outdoor use. Some models allow you to download content for offline streaming, but for consistent at-home use, a mains-powered projector is recommended for better performance and brighter image quality.

TV&Radio

Your guide to what's on BBC Radio 3 this month, plus TV highlights

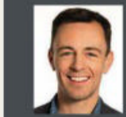

Transformational journey: an Easter pilgrimage to the Chapel of St Non, near St Davids in Pembrokeshire

APRIL'S RADIO 3 LISTINGS

Schedules may be subject to alteration. For up-to-date listings see BBC Sounds and iPlayer

Three to look out for

Colourful stars: Dame Edna Everage on *Private Passions*


Sam Jackson, the controller of BBC Radio 3, selects three programme highlights for the month of April

Spring Changes

Weekday *Breakfast* moves to Radio 3's Salford home and welcomes broadcaster and classical guitarist Tom McKinney as its new host. Meanwhile, Petroc Trelawny joins Katie Derham on the *In Tune* team.
Breakfast & In Tune, from Monday 7 April, 6.30-9.30am; 5-7pm

Private Passions at 30

Revisit some of the most memorable moments from three decades of Michael Berkeley's conversations with a terrific variety of guests. Expect everyone from Sir Isaiah Berlin to Miranda Hart, Jo Brand, Rupert Everett and Dame Edna Everage.
Tuesday 15 April, all day

Easter on 3

Live music kicks off the weekend with Bach's *St Matthew Passion* from Amsterdam's Concertgebouw and the traditional Good Friday evening concert from King's College Cambridge. Outside broadcasts from Iona Abbey and St Non's Chapel in Pembrokeshire celebrate the theme of pilgrimage, and Andrew McGregor presents *Record Review of the Century* throughout Easter Monday, with landmark recordings from the last 25 years.
Friday 18 April to Monday 21 April, all day

1 TUESDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-4pm Classical Live
4-5pm Composer of the Week Mel Bonis
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert from Bridgewater Hall, Manchester. Nørgård *Symphony No.8*, Grieg *Piano Concerto*, Sibelius *Symphony No.3*. Paul Lewis (piano), BBC Philharmonic/John Storgårds
9.45-10pm The Essay
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

2 WEDNESDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-3pm Classical Live
3-4pm Choral Evensong
4-5pm Composer of the Week Mel Bonis
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert live from Royal Festival Hall, London. Prokofiev *Semyon Kotko Suite*, Mussorgsky *Songs and Dances of Death*, Lyatoshynsky *Symphony No.3*. Matthew Rose (bass), LPO/Vladimir Jurowski
9.45-10pm The Essay
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

3 THURSDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-4pm Classical Live
4-5pm Composer of the Week Mel Bonis
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert live from Bridgewater Hall, Manchester. Rossini *Overture: The Thieving Magpie*, Mascagni *Intermezzo (Cavalleria rusticana)*, Verdi *Willow song; Ave Maria (Otello)*, Puccini *Capriccio Sinfonico*, Stravinsky *Pulcinella*. Mariangela Sicilia (soprano), Alessandro Fisher (tenor), James Atkinson (baritone), BBC Philharmonic/Nil Venditti
9.45-10pm The Essay
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

4 FRIDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-4pm Classical Live
4-5pm Composer of the Week Mel Bonis
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Friday Night is Music Night
9.45-10pm The Essay
10-11.30pm Late Junction
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

5 SATURDAY

6.30-9am Saturday Breakfast
9am-12noon Saturday Morning
12-1pm Earlier... with Jools Holland
1-2pm Music Matters Women Composers
2-4pm Record Review
4-5pm Sound of Cinema
5-6pm This Classical Life
6-7.30pm Opera on 3
7.30-9.30pm In Concert
9.30-10.30pm Music Planet
10.30pm-12.30am New Music Show

6 SUNDAY

6.30-9am Sunday Breakfast
9am-12pm Sunday Morning
12-1.30pm Private Passions
1.30-3pm Music Map
3-4pm Choral Evensong
4-5pm Jazz Record Requests
5-6pm The Early Music Show
6-7.15pm Words and Music
7.15-8pm Sunday Feature Robert Elms on Flamenco
8-9pm TBC
9-10pm Modernists
10-11.30pm Ultimate Calm
11.30pm-12.30am Unclassified

7 MONDAY

CHOICE 6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-2pm Live from Wigmore Hall
2-4pm Classical Live
4-5pm Composer of the Week Nielsen
CHOICE 5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert from City Halls, Glasgow. Roukens *Night Flight*, Brahms *Violin Concerto*, Prokofiev *Cinderella Suite*. Ning Feng (violin), BBC Scottish Symphony/Antony Hermus
9.45-10pm The Essay The Meaning and Magic of Music
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

8 TUESDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics

GETTY, CARSTEN WINDHORST

1-4pm Classical Live
4-5pm Composer of the Week Nielsen
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert from Barbican, London. Berg *Three Pieces from the Lyric Suite*, Debussy *Le livre de Baudelaire*, Berg *Der Wein*, Debussy *Nocturnes*. Sophie Bevan (soprano), BBC Symphony Orchestra/Sakari Oramo
9.45-10pm The Essay The Meaning and Magic of Music
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

9 WEDNESDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-3pm Classical Live
3-4pm Choral Evensong
4-5pm Composer of the Week Nielsen
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert from Elgar Concert Hall, Birmingham. Martinů *Concerto for double string orchestra, piano and timpani*, R Strauss *Metamorphosen*, Michael Zev Gordon *A Kind of Haunting*. James Newby (baritone), Britten Sinfonia/Jonathan Berman
9.45-10pm The Essay The Meaning and Magic of Music
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

10 THURSDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-4pm Classical Live
4-5pm Composer of the Week Nielsen
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert from Llandaff Cathedral. Beethoven *Missa Solemnis*. Carolyn Sampson (sop), Sophie Harmsen (mez), Ed Lyon (ten), Darren Jeffery (baritone), BBC National Chorus of Wales, BBC National Orchestra of Wales/Andrew Manze
9.45-10pm The Essay The Meaning and Magic of Music
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

11 FRIDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-4pm Classical Live
4-5pm Composer of the Week Nielsen
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45 Friday Night is Music Night
9.45-10pm The Essay The Meaning and Magic of Music
10-11.30pm Late Junction
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

12 SATURDAY

6.30-9am Saturday Breakfast
9am-12noon Saturday Morning
12-1pm Earlier… with Jools Holland
1-2pm Music Matters
2-4pm Record Review
4-5pm Sound of Cinema
5-6pm This Classical Life
6-9.30pm Opera on 3
9.30-10.30pm Music Planet
10.30pm-12.30am New Music Show

13 SUNDAY

6.30-9am Sunday Breakfast
9am-12pm Sunday Morning
12-1.30pm Private Passions
1.30-3pm Music Map
3-4pm Choral Evensong
4-5pm Jazz Record Requests
5-6pm The Early Music Show
6-7.15pm Words and Music
7.15-9pm EBU Holy Week
9-10pm Modernists
10-11pm Ultimate Calm
11-11.30pm Night Tracks Mix
11.30pm-12.30am Unclassified

14 MONDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-2pm Live from Wigmore Hall
2-4pm Classical Live
4-5pm Composer of the Week Mozart's Last Years
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert from The Lighthouse, Poole. Mozart *The Magic Flute Overture*, Trojan *Fairy Tales Concerto*, Hartmann *Fairy Tales*, Tchaikovsky *Francesca da Rimini*. Ksenija Sidorova (accordion), Bournemouth SO/Kirill Karabits
9.45-10pm The Essay Mythic Mountain
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

15 TUESDAY

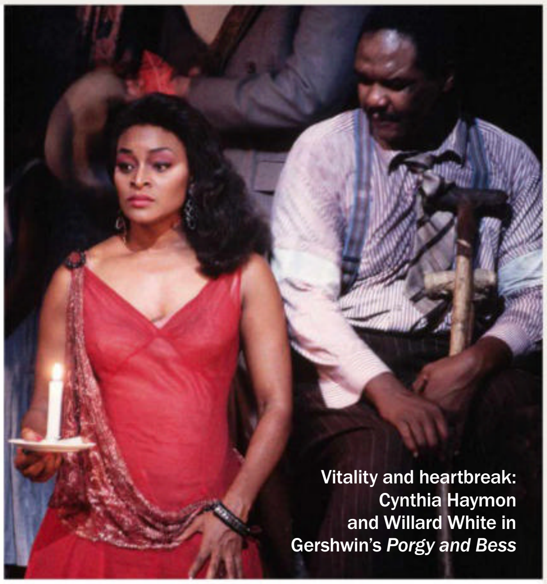
CHOICE 6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-4pm Classical Live
4-5pm Composer of the Week Mozart's Last Years
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm The Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert from Royal Festival Hall, London. Sawer *Sphinx (world premiere)*, Britten *Violin Concerto*, Berlioz *Symphonie Fantastique*. Augustin Hadelich (violin), London Philharmonic Orchestra/Edward Gardner
9.45-10pm The Essay Mythic Mountain
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

16 WEDNESDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-3pm Classical Live
3-4pm Choral Evensong
4-5pm Composer of the Week Mozart's Last Years
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm The Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert live from Barbican, London. Howell *Lamia*, Weill *Der neue Orpheus Op.15*, Mahler *Symphony No.4*. BBC Symphony Orchestra/Sakari Oramo
9.45-10pm The Essay Mythic Mountain
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

17 THURSDAY

6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics



Vitality and heartbreak: Cynthia Haymon and Willard White in Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*

GETTY

TV CHOICE
Porgy and Bess

As part of BBC Four's Musicals Season, here's a rare chance to revisit the first on-screen version of George and Ira Gershwin's groundbreaking 'folk opera'. The Gershwin family considered director Trevor Nunn's moving 1993 production to be a faithful rendition, running practically uncut with original orchestrations. The story of love, hardship and tragedy is set in the African-American community of Catfish Row in South Carolina, a place which reverberates with the singing, dancing, vitality and heartbreak of its inhabitants. It centres around Porgy, a beggar, and the obstacles that tear him from his beloved Bess. Willard White and Cynthia Haymon star in the title roles, with irresistible hits like 'Summertime' and 'It Ain't Necessarily So' underscored by Simon Rattle and the London Philharmonic's classy 1989 recording. *Sunday 13 April, BBC Four and iPlayer*

1-4pm Classical Live
4-5pm Composer of the Week Mozart's Last Years
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert from Hoddinott Hall, Cardiff. Boulez *Livres pour cordes*, *Mémoriale*, Berg *Violin Concerto*, Messiaen *Les offrandes oubliées*, Wagner *Tristan und Isolde: Prelude and Liebestod*. Matthew Featherstone (flute), Ava Bahari (violin), BBC NOW/Daniel Cohen
9.45-10pm The Essay Mythic Mountain
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

18 FRIDAY
BBC RADIO 3 **CHOICE 6.30-9.30am Breakfast**
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-4pm Classical Live
4-5pm Composer of the Week Mozart's Last Years
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45 Music Night
9.45-10pm The Essay Mythic Mountain
10-11.30pm Late Junction
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

19 SATURDAY
6.30-9am Saturday Breakfast
9am-12noon Saturday Morning
12noon-1pm Earlier... with Jools Holland
1-2pm Music Matters
2-4pm Record Review
4-5pm Sound of Cinema
5-6pm This Classical Life
6-9.30pm Opera on 3
9.30-10.30pm Music Planet
10.30pm-12.30am New Music

20 SUNDAY
6.30-9am Sunday Breakfast
9am-12pm Sunday Morning
12-1.30pm Private Passions
1.30-3pm Music Map
3-4pm Choral Evensong
4-5pm Jazz Record Requests
5-6pm The Early Music Show
6-7.15pm Words and Music
7.15-8pm Sunday Feature Colour of Pomegranates
8-9pm TBC
9-10pm Modernists
10-11pm Ultimate Calm
11-11.30pm Night Tracks Mix
11.30pm-12.30am Unclassified

21 MONDAY
6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-9.45pm Record Review of the Century
9.45-10pm The Essay
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

22 TUESDAY
6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-4pm Classical Live
4-5pm Composer of the Week
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert from Barbican, London. Vaughan Williams *Serenade*, Carwithen *Concerto for Piano and Strings*, Arnold *Symphony No. 5*. Alexandra Dariescu (pf), BBC Singers, BBC SO/Oramo
9.45-10pm The Essay
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

23 WEDNESDAY
6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-3pm Classical Live
3-4pm Choral Evensong
4-5pm Composer of the Week
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert from Bridgewater Hall, Manchester. Duruflé *Three Dances*, Chausson *Poème de l'amour et de la mer*, Saint-Saëns *Symphony No. 3*. Alice Coote (mez), BBC Phil/John Wilson
9.45-10pm The Essay
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

24 THURSDAY
6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-4pm Classical Live
4-5pm Composer of the Week
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert live from City Halls, Glasgow. Bonis *Trois Femmes de légende*. Javier Peranies (pf), BBC SSO/Anja Bihlmaier
9.45-10pm The Essay
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

25 FRIDAY
6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-4pm Classical Live
4-5pm Composer of the Week
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45 Friday Night is Music Night
9.45-10pm The Essay
10-11.30pm Late Junction
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

26 SATURDAY
6.30-9am Saturday Breakfast
9am-12noon Saturday Morning
12-1pm Earlier... with Jools Holland
1-2pm Music Matters
2-4pm Record Review
4-5pm Sound of Cinema
5-6pm This Classical Life
6-9.30pm Opera on 3
9.30-10.30pm Music Planet
10.30pm-12.30am New Music

27 SUNDAY
6.30-9am Sunday Breakfast
9am-12pm Sunday Morning
12-1.30pm Private Passions
1.30-3pm Music Map
3-4pm Choral Evensong
4-5pm Jazz Record Requests
5-6pm The Early Music Show
6-7.15pm Words and Music
7.15-8pm Sunday Feature The Joys of Yiddish Tango
8-9pm Brass Banding
9-10pm Modernists
10-11pm Ultimate Calm
11-11.30pm Night Tracks Mix
11.30pm-12.30am Unclassified

28 MONDAY
6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-2pm Live from Wigmore Hall
2-4pm Classical Live
4-5pm Composer of the Week Jacquet de La Guerre
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert from Bridgewater Hall, Manchester. Higdon *Percussion Concerto*, Stravinsky *Petrushka*. Jordan Ashman (perc), National Youth Orchestra/Joana Carneiro
9.45-10pm The Essay
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

29 TUESDAY
6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-4pm Classical Live
4-5pm Composer of the Week Jacquet de La Guerre
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert from Barbican, London. Holmès *Roland furieux*, Mendelssohn *Violin Concerto*, Korngold *Sinfonietta*. Paul Huang (vn), BBC SO/Marie Jacquot
9.45-10pm The Essay
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

30 WEDNESDAY
6.30-9.30am Breakfast
9.30am-1pm Essential Classics
1-3pm Classical Live
3-4pm Choral Evensong
4-5pm Composer of the Week Jacquet de La Guerre
5-7pm In Tune
7-7.30pm Classical Mixtape
7.30-9.45pm Radio 3 In Concert from Wigmore Hall, London. Works by Chopin and Schumann. Eric Lu (piano).
9.45-10pm The Essay
10-11.30pm Night Tracks
11.30pm-12.30am 'Round Midnight

QUIZ ANSWERS from p 104
1. Handel's *Messiah*
2. Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky
3. *Albert Herring*
4. The sinking of *RMS Titanic* ('Nearer, My God, to Thee' was said to have been played by the ship's band at the time of the collision)
5. Johannes Brahms
6. Gustav Holst
7. Ferruccio Busoni
8. Hector Berlioz (who had hoped to marry Moke himself, but her mother disapproved)
9. John Foulds
10. Thomas Morley

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THE QUIZ

Time to test yourselves with this month's ten questions...

1. Which great choral work was first performed at the Musick Hall in Dublin on 13 April 1742?

2. 'Snowdrop' represents the month of April in which composer's 12-movement solo piano work *The Seasons*?

3. The action of which Britten opera begins on 10 April 1900, with a meeting about the selection of the May Queen?

4. Which April 1912 event is the subject of Nielsen's wind band work *Nearer, My God, to Thee*?

5. 'Ah, that tastes good!' were reportedly the last words of which composer, on enjoying a glass of wine shortly before his death, aged 63, on 3 April 1897?

6. Premiered in 1923, *The Perfect Fool* is a one-act opera by whom?

7. Anything but a fool, the brilliantly talented pianist and composer pictured above was born in Empoli, Italy on 1 April 1866. Who is he?

8. Who, in April 1831, set out from Florence on a mission to murder the concert pianist Marie 'Camille' Moke and her husband-to-be Camille Pleyel, heir to the piano manufacturing fortune?

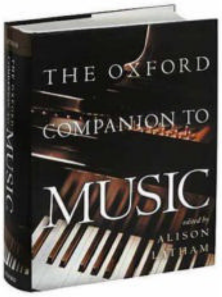
9. Later orchestrated, *April-England* is a 1926 piano work by which British composer, who in fact spent the last part of his life living in India?

10. And which English composer wrote the popular madrigal 'April is in my mistress' face', published in 1594?

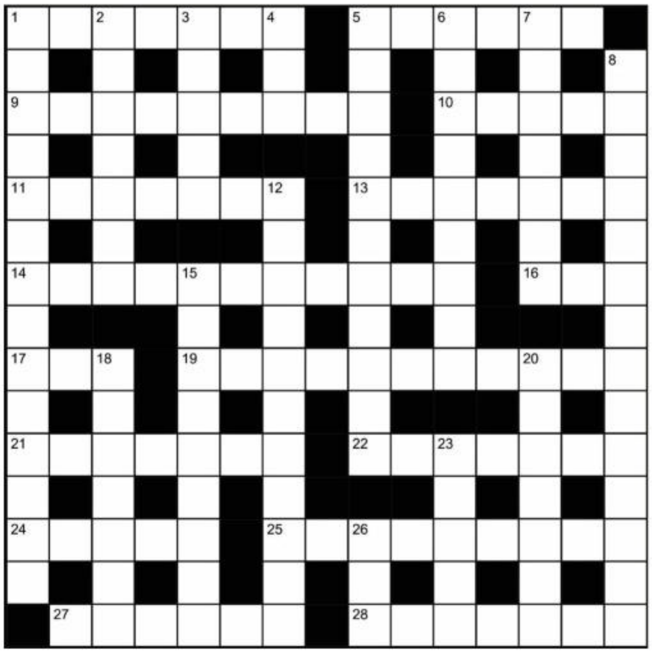
See p102 for answers

The *BBC Music Magazine* PRIZE CROSSWORD NO. 410

Crossword set by **Paul Henderson**



The first correct solution of our crossword picked at random will win a copy of **The Oxford Companion to Music.** A runner-up will win **Who Knew? Answers to Questions about Classical Music** (see oup.co.uk). Send answers to: *BBC Music Magazine*, Crossword 410/April 2025, PO Box 501, Leicester, LE94 0AA to arrive by 17 April 2025 (solution in July '25 issue).



Your name & address ....

....

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....

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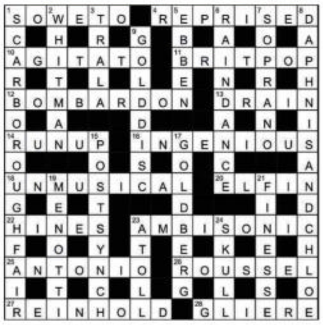
ACROSS

- 1 Most of panel accepting piano piece (unfinished) – work by Mozart? (7)
- 5 Note I'm taking baton for Elgar variation (6)
- 9 German music centre: Germany's unusual mad arts town, originally (9)
- 10 Point about recording store (5)
- 11 Not performing Ireland overture describing woodland spirits (7)
- 13 Auditory discrimination: bass remains for Aussie lecture (7)
- 14 Dancer leapt around for French composer (5,6)
- 16 English basses decline (3)
- 17 Gentle sound not entirely fashionable? (3)
- 19 First and last characters caught in arias one revised for sort of oratorio (6,5)
- 21 British composer inclined to smile? (7)
- 22 Pop star's involving right players in section of orchestra (7)
- 24 Join one in version of tune (5)
- 25 Rewrite poem and score after review (9)
- 27 Girl meeting American choral composer (6)
- 28 Danced and catcalled after US soldier interrupted (7)

DOWN

- 1 Oratorio featuring traitor: English composer penning one with us (5,9)
- 2 Ignored copyright? Pianist initially angry with head of department (7)
- 3 Extract from sonata – seriously, it's a stunner (5)
- 4 First bit of aria lost – something that's drowned (3)
- 5 European country getting stern with Handel, possibly (11)
- 6 Movements delivered by muse during Oxford exam (9)
- 7 Character depicted by Saint-Saëns with old mezzo piano sound (7)
- 8 English opera? Ah, heartbeats do get excited (2,3,5,4)
- 12 Rich vocals swirling round Schubert piece with keyboards (11)
- 15 They inspect instrument inventor upset about someone making digs? (9)
- 18 Company promoted operatic song involving new wind instrument (7)
- 20 Fugal form I used to capture unknown Italian songs (7)
- 23 Gounod character in Italian city before start of opera (5)
- 26 Section of *Tosca* being something transporting? (3)

JANUARY SOLUTION
No. 407



JANUARY WINNER
Stephen Higgins, Staines

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GETTY, JULIA WESELY/DG

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Music that changed me

Jeff Goldblum

Actor, Pianist

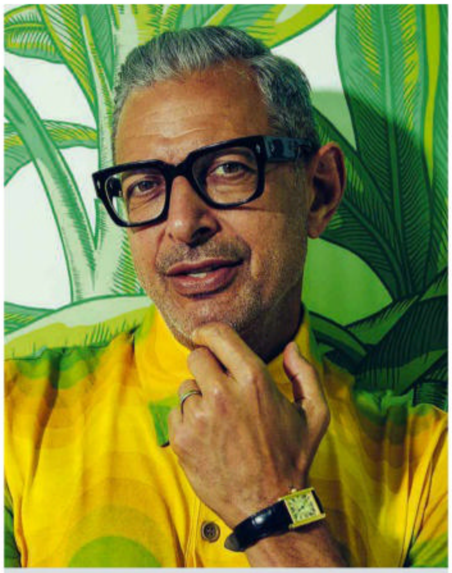
You may well know him from the Hollywood blockbusters *Jurassic Park*, *Independence Day* and *Wicked*, but you may not realise the American superstar also knows his way around a piano. With his Mildred Snitzer Orchestra, Goldblum has played Glastonbury and Ronnie Scott's, and their fourth album is out on 25 April on Decca.

When I was 15, I got it in my head to get the telephone book, look up 'Cocktail Lounges' and cold call them: 'Hey, I heard you need a pianist…' Some said, 'We don't even have a piano,' but others said, 'Yeah, how old are you? Come on over and let's hear you play.' And I got a couple of jobs that way. I had been playing piano since about the age of nine or ten; our parents, progressive and wonderful as they were, got us lessons. My two older brothers took clarinet and a couple of other things that didn't stick, but me and my younger sister Pam took piano.

I took to it and started to learn to read music, but I was a bad student – I didn't know the joys of discipline yet. Every week my teacher Tommy Emil would come over and I hadn't practised; he'd be miserable and I'd be miserable, but after a year or so he gave me an arrangement to some jazzy tune – I think it was **ALLEY CAT**, with syncopation, which I just loved. That's when I started to really get better. Then seeing I had kind of a flair for, or an interest in, jazz I was sent to Frank Cunimondo; and, sure enough, he taught me harmony, extensions and things like that.

My dad brought home the new **ERROLL GARNER** record, *Erroll Garner plays Misty,* and that was his favourite song. Him bringing home that record and me digging it was an important moment for me. My brother was four years older, and he was into jazz right around my formative teen years, too. He was into Modern Jazz Quartet, Miles Davis and Bossa Nova – he played the Stan Getz album with Astrud Gilberto a lot. I'm still into all those things that he liked.

SELA SHILONI



'I'd sneak my playing into a movie or two, like *The Fly* and *Earth Girls Are Easy*'

After I got those gigs in the cocktail lounges, I decided I wanted to be an actor. Music was only for fun, or pure passion without careerist fantasies; acting was what I had my heart set on, so I went to New York and pursued it till, miraculously, I started to get opportunities. I fell into a Broadway show in 1971. It was **TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA**, which John Guare had adapted from the Shakespeare play, with a Galt MacDermot score. It was a big hit at 'Shakespeare in the Park' and we went to Broadway. I was in the chorus and understudied one of the parts, but people would come in and out of the pit, including Thad Jones. My dad being the jazz fan that he was, we would vacation in Atlantic City, and he saw that the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis big band was playing, and we went to see them. So I said to Thad, 'I saw you guys!' and we would jam before the show.

I had a piano in my apartment and I'd started to get movies, so I'd sneak my playing into a movie or two, like *The Fly* and *Earth Girls Are Easy*. When I was doing Robert Altman's *Nashville* in 1974, Shelley Duvall and I were pals, and she said, 'Hey, I'm crazy about this guy **DAVID BOWIE** and he's coming to Nashville. Let's go!' So she and I went; it was the *Diamond Dogs* and 'Ziggy Stardust' period. Ten years later he was in a movie that I was in called *Into the Night*, so I got a chance to know him a little bit. That was inspirational.

Several years ago, **GREGORY PORTER** was appearing on *The Graham Norton Show* with me and he said at the last minute, 'Hey, I'm promoting this Nat King Cole record and I want to sing "Mona Lisa" just with a piano. Maybe you could learn the part and we could do it together?' Tom Lewis, the head of Decca, saw the show and thought that maybe they should do some music with me.

When I met Cynthia Erivo and Ariana Grande on the set of **WICKED**, I could have been intimidated by their masterful, prodigious gifts, lifelong devotion, discipline and mastery of their instruments and their acting. But I'm always bushy tailed and such a fan of music, and theirs, that I couldn't stop myself from singing in between every take! We'd do the American Songbook, every show tune I could think of, and they loved it all and were so cordial and so sweet.

We've got two boys, seven and nine, and they're both studying piano. They play a couple of times a week with their wonderful teacher, and then it falls to me and their mom to facilitate their practice. That's been a challenging, delicious and nourishing multi-coloured experience, but also very delightful. Charlie, the older one, is impressive: he's playing *Flight of the Bumblebee*! River is now learning **LIEBESTRÄUME**, which I played with Tommy Emil early on. Talk about nostalgia and things coming full circle; that has been very meaningful to me, working with them on their piano. *Interview by Michael Beek*

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